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Snoek scam frays a tight-knit community

Angela Reitsma Bick

As much as $34 million may be lost to 80 Dutch Canadians who invested with Mississauga-based Harry Snoek Limited. The company began in the 1960s, buying and selling land for condominiums in Toronto, suburban houses in Brampton and eventually commercial property in Milton. Harry Snoek Sr., a "true gentleman," financed his purchases with cash from investors, which he exchanged for promissory notes and regularly repaid with competitive rates of interest. Snoek is a well-known name in Christian Reformed circles, and the company flourished.

86-year-old John Kolkman went to the same church as Snoek Sr. for many years. They both sent children to Willowdale Christian School. Kolkman remembers serving together as deacons in 1954, travelling around Toronto to introduce the donation envelope system to church members. Snoek Sr. wondered aloud if real estate seemed like a worthwhile venture.

"Sure," Kolkman replied. "A big city like Toronto can only expand."

They remained acquaintances, and in 1994 Kolkman sold his house and invested $229,000 – his life savings – with Snoek Sr. Kolkman's work as a journeyman carpenter didn't leave him with a private pension, but he and his wife Margaret were able to live off the eight percent interest from their investment. They had no trouble accessing their investment capital for dental bills and other expenses over the years.

Shaky succession

In 2003, Snoek Sr.'s health forced him to retire. He moved to a nursing home in the Netherlands, and his son, Harry Snoek Jr., took over the land development business. The exact timeline of Snoek Jr.'s succession was not clear to investors. A self-professed entrepreneur, Snoek Jr. was involved in franchises and other money-making schemes prior to assuming control of the company's real estate base. He seemed to have a taste for expensive watches, cars, boats and paintings. The *Toronto Star* accessed Snoek's records, which show that "more than $20 million left Canada since 2004, including $6 million for the yacht and $10.8 million to Snoek Jr." Meanwhile, investors who had trusted his father kept supplying Snoek Jr. with cash. "It was so nice for him to play with money; he thought there would be no end to it," says Kolkman.

By the fall of 2008, however, the end was getting closer, at least for investors. The much-touted land north of Milton finally had more investors than it could handle. The surplus cash was spent or lost. Kolkman recounts that a secretary from Harry Snoek Ltd. called investors to admit, "We can't pay the eight percent anymore. The economy is down, so we'll make it seven."

Dishonest or dumb?

That December, south of the border, Bernie Madoff made history by confessing to the biggest investor fraud ever committed by one person. Around the same time, Snoek's investors received a worrisome letter. Snoek Jr. blamed "the global credit crunch" for forcing him to "suspend interest and principal payments" completely. When spooked investors tried to withdraw their funds, Snoek dropped out of touch. He disappeared for almost a year, and his exact location is still unknown. Currently, he's believed to be in the Middle East,

See **Scam** *on p.2*

200 investors want their money back from Snoek Jr.

John Kolkman, a retired carpenter, had to borrow money for his wife Margaret's funeral in January after losing his life savings to Harry Snoek Jr.

Highlight on Health Care: US Post Script

Obama's health care gambit succeeds

President Obama signed his landmark health care bill into law on March 23.

Mike Wevers

Despite the ongoing (and sometimes nasty) political rhetoric in the United States following the passage of President Obama's health reform legislation, the President was entitled to some personal lamb-like tranquility as the month of March came to an end. It was his lion-like roar, after all, that pushed health reform forward earlier last month.

Abortion and health reform

The President's will to pass the legislation could have been thwarted by some of his own Democratic Party members in the House of Representatives, where the vote margin was very close (219 to 212). Many of us who do not like the status quo in Canada – where abortions, whether medically required or elective, are publicly funded – prefer the more restrictive access to publicly funded abortions in the United States. Some pro-life Democrats indicated they could not support health reform if it resulted in unlimited taxpayer funding of abortions (see sidebar). To obtain the critical support of these handful of representatives, President Obama signed an Executive Order just prior to the House vote to ensure that public funding for abortions will only be provided in the long standing strict cases of rape, incest, or where the health of the mother is in danger.

In the respected *New England*

See **Health care** *on p.2*

News

Scam *continued from p.1*

where he's "hustling for business opportunities to pay back investors."

But Kolkman thinks the money is gone. He told *CC* that his promissory notes are useless –"it looks like Snoek Jr. never told the truth." Kolkman's wife Margaret passed away in January. Without savings, Kolkman had to borrow $6,000 for her funeral. But Kolkman remains steadfast in his faith, pointing out that "money is not the most important thing." He proudly recounts how his two daughters spent months caring for their ailing mother around the clock. The part-time homecare nurses provided by OHIP said they'd never seen anything like this faithfulness.

Ripple effect

Henry Eygenraam, Executive Director of Christian Stewardship Services, has known the Harry Snoek Sr. family for years, serving together with his wife Cathy as elders in Willowdale Church. "Harry Sr. had a long track record of integrity and success in the real estate development business. I have personal knowledge of pastors and other families he helped in their financial crises," he says.

As he expresses concern for the family members suffering on the sidelines from the actions of Snoek Jr., Eygenraam grasps a teachable moment. He thinks the high level of integrity and trust earned by Harry Sr. inadvertently created the right atmosphere for the current crisis.

"This is not the first time I have heard people say, 'He's a fine Christian guy, he goes to our church,' and they suspend their normal due diligence." If you're investing, Eygenraam emphasizes, don't rely on reputation alone; do your homework and make sure assets, appropriate structure, organization and accountability mechanisms are in place to back up your investments (see sidebar for further tips on how to invest wisely).

"This does hurt the community," Eygenraam concludes, "beyond the people who have financial stakes in it. People will lose trust, and that's an unfortunate thing." He points out that there are several seniors' housing developments across Canada which hold millions of dollars in promissory notes. The availability of unsecured promissory note financing is critical for these institutions.

"People are willing to lend them [money] based on trust, physical buildings, corporate organization and accountability through boards and committees." But Eygenraam is concerned that the next time someone wants to raise funds to build a school or a seniors' residence, it's going to be harder because of the actions of men like Harry Snoek Jr.

One charity has also lost money to the Snoeks – the Canadian Christian Education Foundation (CCEF). This non-profit based in Guelph facilitates the development of curriculum for Christian schools – textbooks and teachers' guides with a Christian worldview. In a press release, CCEF "grieves" that a portion of their capital trust fund with Snoek Ltd has decreased in value, either due to "poor business decisions" or "outright fraud."

CC called Barbara Ferrier, the Executive Director of CCEF, to see how this organization will be affected. Ferrier says that CCEF can weather waiting for recovered funds more easily than individuals can. She admits, however, that "the interest had been comfortably covering our overhead, and now that has to come from other sources." Consequently, CCEF's ability to support curriculum development has been diminished. Snoek was entrusted with $356,000, which represents a significant portion of CCEF's Capital Trust Fund. No one is sure how much of that money will be recovered, but even losing the revenue stream that the interest provided is a significant loss for CCEF.

Nonetheless, Ferrier stresses that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish his work of supporting Christian education," despite such setbacks. And how does she feel toward Snoek Jr? She leaves that in heavenly hands, too. "Only the Lord knows whether there was really the intent to defraud, or whether it was overconfidence or foolishness." Meanwhile, CCEF has joined the Creditors Action Group in Brantford, which is compiling information for a lawsuit against Snoek Jr. in the hopes that all parties will reclaim their original investments.

Angela Reitsma Bick (angela@christiancourier.ca) is co-editor of CC. She lives in Barrie.

How to avoid investment fraud

Henry Eygenraam

It has been said that the financial markets are driven by fear and greed. This may be tongue in cheek; however, the relationship between risk and rate of return cannot be discounted. Low interest rates and "down" markets influence people to look for more attractive alternatives to meet their income needs. This environment is a hotbed for investment propositions of questionable merit and can drive investors to make decisions without understanding the risks.

"He/she is a member of our church" should never be a basis for investment decisions without considering due diligence suggestions such as these:

What are the hard assets that support the investment proposal?

Request a prospectus or several years of audited financial statements.

Is there a history of regular, transparent financial reporting?

Investigate the fund's management structure. A fund may have a long positive record. Check for changes in the management team. The new team may not replicate the performance.

Beware of "one man shows." Who is making the investment decisions, and what are their qualifications? Do they have investment or financial- and related- industry experience?

Check on the fund's performance compared to various benchmarks. If returns exceed comparable investments drastically, there is likely significant risk involved. If an investment's "guaranteed return" is ten percent when comparable investments earn three percent, it should raise red flags.

Does your investment timeline, liquidity needs and "risk for loss" tolerance match the investment timeline, liquidity availability, and level of risk inherent in the investment?

Health care *continued from p.1*

Journal of Medicine, Dr. George Annas reminds us that the legislation's passage represents support for maternal health in the broadest pro-life sense, where mothers previously without health care insurance will now have better access to pre- and post- natal care for them and their babies. Dr. Annas, Chair and Professor of Health Law, Bioethics, and Human Rights at the Boston University School of Public Health, says that this helps explain why the Catholic Health Association of the United States supported Obama's health care reform proposal.

With some irony, within a week of the Congressional approval of the health reform bill, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was in Canada lecturing Prime Minister Harper on this issue. Our PM wants to have an initiative to improve maternal health in developing countries as a centrepiece of a G8 Conference he is hosting in June. When Harper wavered on how much to include about reproductive health, Ms. Clinton opined that you cannot have maternal health without reproductive health, which she believes includes "contraception, family planning and access to legal, safe abortion." It appears the U.S. Secretary of State wants developing nations to have the same services as Canadians rather than the restrictive access reinforced by the President's recent Executive Order.

Health care reform costs – taxes and politics

It may be too early to determine how this will affect President Obama and the Democrats politically. Receiving no Republican support for his legislation, Obama had to sacrifice one of his platform promises: to decrease bipartisanship in Washington. Indeed, the health care debate has only served to heighten the political division. However, any time a politician delivers on a key platform promise, it increases his or her credibility, especially when the odds appeared to be so much against it and where so many have failed before. A recent Gallup poll indicated that 49 percent of Americans thought health reform was a good thing while 40 percent disagreed – not a clear majority, but a significant edge.

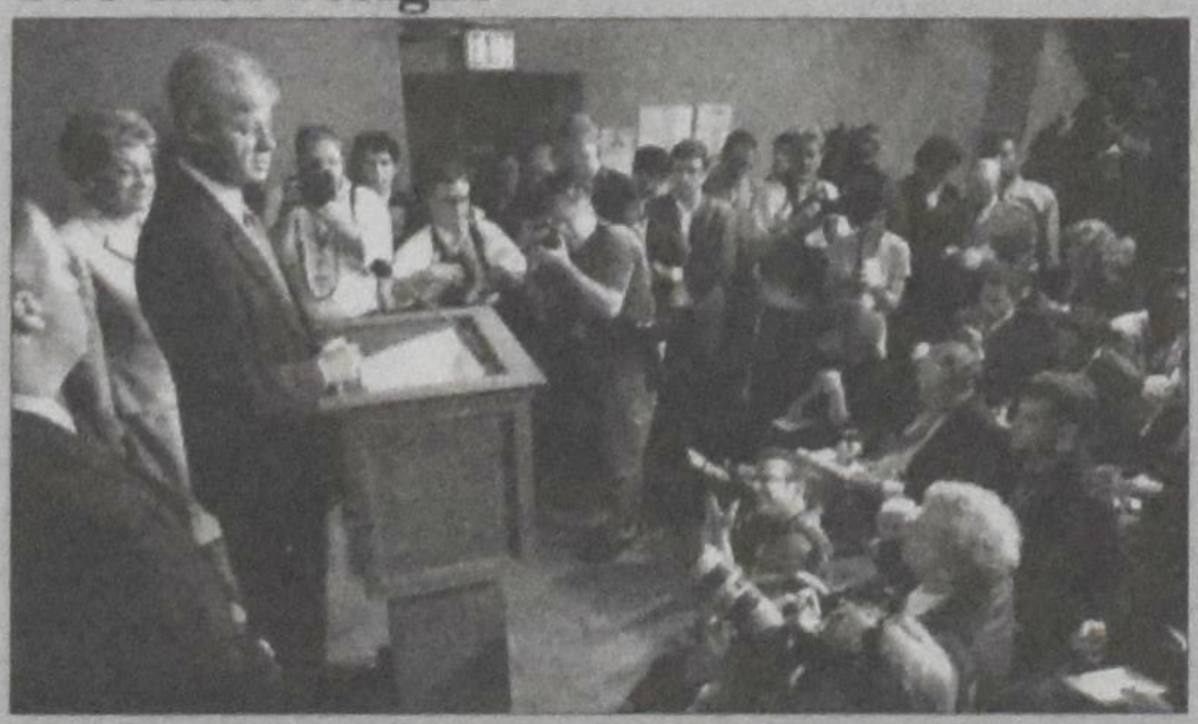
Some political observers and health reform activists believed there should have been more bipartisan effort to achieve a more complete reform package. Part of that effort could have been put in to understanding better the anticipated costs of extending coverage to many more Americans. The taxpayer cost of Obama's health reform package will be significant and his plan to pay for it is far from certain. As previously discussed, costs will be covered first from savings anticipated in better management of existing US health programs. The remaining cost is to come from higher taxes paid by high-income earners and businesses. So if the savings are not realized, will the taxpayer automatically have to pick up more of the cost? What about attacking the bloated cost of American health care, where greater efficiencies must be sought? Some political observers believe more work could have been done on these issues prior to passing the legislation.

Politics as blood sport

The conservative political activist and ex-pat Canadian David Frum said the Republican Party might have met its Waterloo in the health reform battle. He believed there should have been more effort to seek compromise. But there will be no turning back on extending health insurance to the over 30 million people who could not afford it before, especially based on pre-existing health conditions. So even though the Republicans and the conservative media in the U.S. continue to say that a future Congress could rescind this legislation,

See **Health care** *on p.2*

Pro-lifer resigns



Rep. Stupak helped keep health care bill anti-abortion.

The Democrats will be engaging its Congressional battles with one less pro-life representative. Bart Stupak from Michigan announced recently that he would not be seeking re-election. Mr. Stupak suffered many attacks, including death threats, for supporting health care reform and his pivotal role in obtaining the Executive Order restricting abortion access. He stated these attacks played no part in his decision to leave politics. Having achieved health reform, he said his Congressional work was done. Hopefully that is the true reason he is leaving; the political system cannot afford to lose the principled participation he recently displayed because of ill-founded criticism from those who should have given him his strongest support.

News

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

Mission as crime and human right

Peter Schuurman

It is ironic that just as the church is coming to define itself more centrally as *mission*, others in our culture are speaking of mission as a heinous crime. There is a fear that "proselytism" – inviting others to embrace a new way of life – will hurt people's psyche and destroy their traditional culture.

There is reason for this fear, and not just from Christian colonial history – Islam and secular communism, for example, have their shameful episodes as well.

At a religious studies conference at Wilfred Laurier recently an undergraduate presented a paper decrying "Christian privilege" in Canada. Her particular focus was the work of the "Gideons" – the group that makes Bibles available for hospitals, schools, and hotels. She declared this to be evidence of Christian privilege in Canada, and since all privilege in her estimation automatically creates oppression, she concluded that the Gideons' work – and all other public Christian expressions, like Christmas – were unjust. Her paper ended with a call to action – a list of resources that would help resist and overcome Christian privilege in our country.

Another student presented a paper on conversion in which he quoted a Yoruba (African traditional religion) representative: "Conversion is a form of genocide. It is a cruel aspect of colonialism, slavery, arrogance and hegemony of one people over another. Let us all, as religious leaders of the world, struggle against this terrible aspect of religion." Jews, Hindus, and Muslims, too, are extremely nervous about Christian evangelists in their midst.

Conversion ethics

Of course, not everyone agrees. The World Council of Churches and the Vatican have released a report on ethical conduct for interreligious conversion. It declares that freedom of religion, including freedom to propagate the teachings of one's faith to those of other persuasions, is a human right. Because rights always come with responsibility, proselytizers have a responsibility to respect other faiths, and "never to denigrate, vilify, or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming the superiority of one's own faith." Self-criticism, reform and even repentance are necessary to right past wrongs, the report continues.

Perhaps this proposal will lead to some good discussion, but Dr. Paul Freston (formerly at Calvin College) is not convinced universal statements can be universally applied. He gave a lecture in March at a conference on religion and globalization at Wilfred Laurier University in which he argued against the "common sense" that automatically shuns the idea of proselytization. After all, he said, it was the propagation of Protestantism that introduced to the world the whole idea of the right to choose and change religion in the first place.

Dr. Freston argued against anti-proselytizing declarations on a number of levels. One reason is that they paternalistically assume those who convert are passive dupes of oppressive systems. In fact, conversion can mean liberation for some people (for example, the "untouchables" in India.) Additionally, in an age of persuasion, anti-proselytization singles out one group – *religious* persuaders – for regulation. "A missionary is only a particular kind of activist," he explained.

Secular privilege

Often these anti-conversion rules, he went on to say, are a form of special pleading – e.g. Muslims or Hindus who risk losing adherents. But religion cannot be frozen in time. The fact is that proselytizing revitalizes religion – on all sides of the engagement. It is political control that impoverishes all religion.

Finally, Freston said that the right to convert is connected to the right to be proselytized. Wealthy Western travelers have numerous religious options to choose from, but the poor are dependent on having options brought to them by others. There is something elitist in barring others from invitations to new faith.

These are a few of the nuances to keep in mind when debating conversion. Universal rules are a tricky enterprise. Each nation around the globe has its own history that requires long-term cultural transformation in order for conduct codes to change. What might be a lofty goal for Saudi Arabia may not be appropriate for Turkey or Indonesia, for example.

In Canada, approximately 70 percent of citizens self-identify as Christians. For these people to publicly express their faith (and model an ethical way of doing so) is a human right and responsibility. But can *public institutions* allow Bibles to be distributed through their halls to those who are interested in having them? Given the overwhelming Christian history of Canada, a desire for a thick pluralism, and current levels of ignorance about faith, it might not be a bad idea. With secular privilege the way it is, however, I can't see it being permitted much longer.

Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is working towards his PhD and teaches World Religion at Redeemer.

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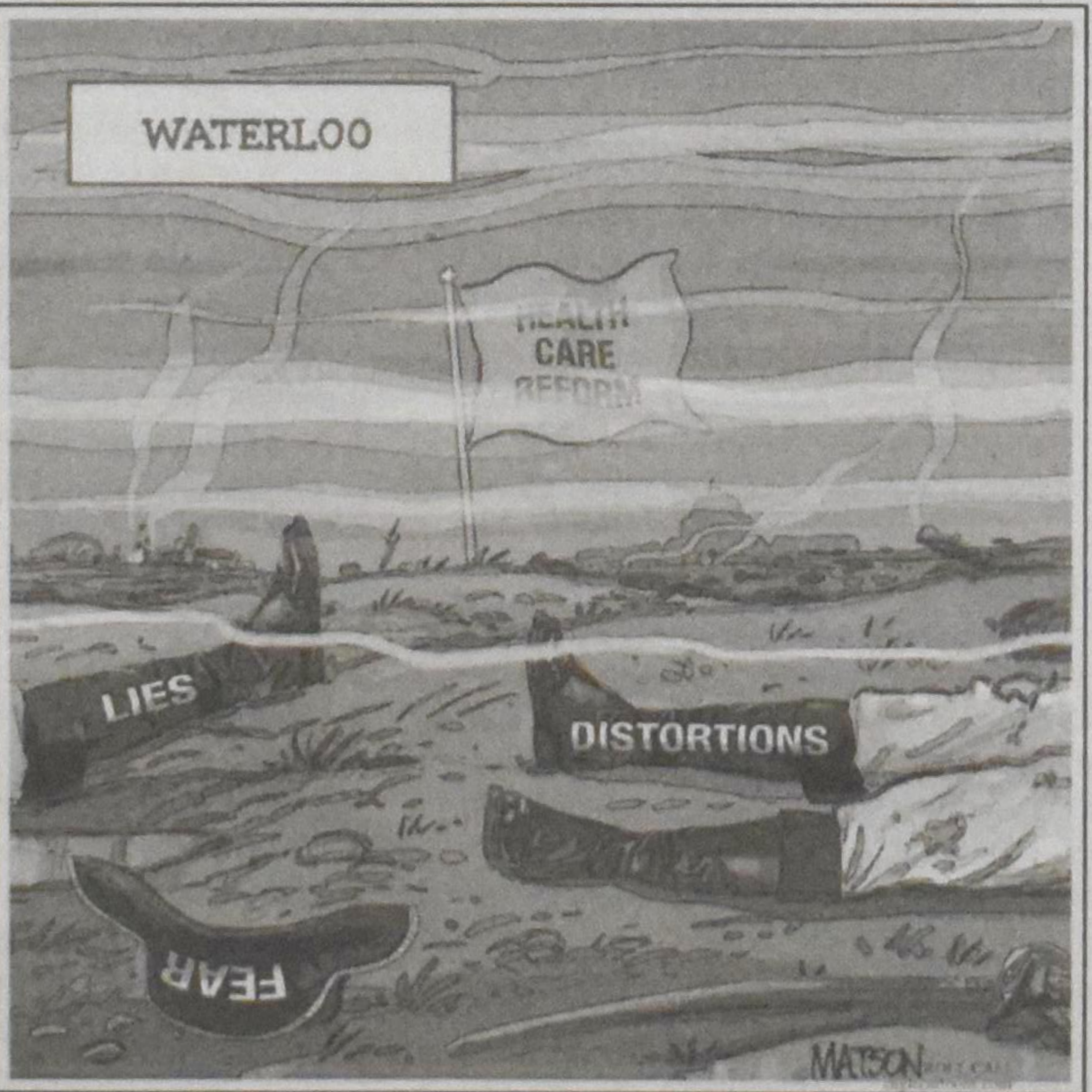
it would be over the protests of those who have newly won coverage, and for the next two years at least, a President Obama veto.

Health reform unfolding

Passing legislation may have been the easy part of moving U.S. health reform forward. It was achieved with little change to its high cost, which is second to none in the world. Uncertainty over how much the new health care bill will be may yet prove to be the undoing of some of the health care reform initiatives. This is, no doubt, why some of the American states are developing a constitutional challenge to the federal initiative, fearing the costs they will inherit owing to reform. It's similar to the concern of Canadian provinces when our federal government acts in areas of provincial responsibility. However, health reform in the US is now a reality and President Obama will not be deterred in putting the fundamental changes in place. His gambit succeeded where many failed through decades of inaction. It's an historic victory, fulfilling his vision that all people should have access to reasonable medical care, and with this victory the United States has finally joined the rank of nations where this has always been a simple truth.



Mike Wevers was Director of Physician Services for 5 years in Alberta Health and Wellness, responsible for negotiating and administering the government's Master Agreement with the Alberta Medical Association.

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Editorials

The nation with a rubber heart

Peter Schuurman

"Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity," said media professor Marshall McLuhan. This may be true no more. Something has changed.

For generations we have looked across the border to the south and observed a country with not just a strong identity, but a civil religion. For example, if you've ever been to Washington, D. C., you will have seen the mammoth shrines in which they venerate past presidents.

Comparatively, Canada has appeared impoverished. "In Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canada has at last produced a political leader worthy of assassination," said poet Irving Layton; and, yet, Trudeau died an old man. We have tried without success to construct a national identity around such things as climate (too cold and lonely), *Anne of Green Gables* (too fictional), peacekeeping (we're actually #52nd in this regard in the world), anti-Americanism (too negative), and the multicultural mosaic idea (which offers no unifying focus). For decades all potential sacred symbols have been rejected by the reality of our "two solitudes," three founding peoples or our stubborn regionalism.

Now, we finally have something more. In early 2010, a patriotic fire has sparked from the sports' arena. Pundits are calling it "the new Canadian patriotism," and name the rowdy swirl of red and white at the Winter Olympics as primary evidence. The record-breaking 14 gold medals were the crown of an odyssey that included stories like that of our first home-soil gold medal winner Alexandre Bilodeau (and his inspiring brother), and that of the Terry Fox Award winning bronze medalist skater Joannie Rochette. Yet these stirring stories are not the heart of this new national feeling.

Holy hockey!

If there is a Canadian civil religion, the object of worship is symbolized in six ounces of black rubber. Twenty-eight million people – CTV says 98 percent of Canadians (!) – were watching the big hockey game, the climax of the Olympics, when Canada beat the USA in nail-biting over-time. Unlike the grisly War of 1812-1815 or the Battle of Vimy Ridge, this clash of powers feeds a patriotism without widows and orphans. The Olympics, after all, is a dramatic international competition that offers combat heroes without war.

"Hockey is our game, and Crosby is our King" declares the chorus of David Porteous' YouTube song entitled "Go, Canada, Go!" With such a wave of enthusiasm, it's hard to imagine what might have happened if the Americans had won. A media panic ensued when Sidney Crosby's stick and gloves were misplaced, and the return of the winning puck has restored the sanity of the nation. The puck will be permanently

housed in the Hockey Hall of Fame, but not before it goes on tour across the country like some ancient religious relic.

"That puck will live forever," said Hockey Canada chief Bob Nicholson, who was careful to stress that they absolutely verified the chain of custody of the puck. "It's not just about hockey," said one fan at the puck's unveiling, "it's about a real strong sense of nationalism inspired by the goal."

The PM was not going to be left out. He read with typical Canadian apology, "We will ask the world to forgive us this time, this uncharacteristic outburst of patriotism and pride, our pride of being part of a country that is strong, confident, and stands tall among the nations."

Pride without injustice

As Reformed Christians, we can celebrate some of the good feelings of nationhood. Like the bonds of marriage, the solidarity of patriotism need not exclude a little romance. Nation-building can draw people together who share the same land for mutual benefit. Yet as Christians we would not want to be deaf to the protests that were raised at the Olympics, or at any moment allow our pride of nation to blind us to the injustices that still plague "His Dominion." I am reminded of First Nations Chief Elijah Harper, who said not that long ago: "We have never been a part of this country."

Civil religion, especially when wed to one's Christian faith, can become an idol upon which other peoples can be sacrificed. Politicians can use patriotic symbols and language to help justify war or torture. Patriotism can breed an ugly arrogance, a false sense of unity, xenophobia, and even imperialism. It can stifle self-critique.

This is why the closing ceremonies of the Olympics were so poignant. Although not everyone caught the humour, after Canada's arguably most triumphant athletic competition in history, the doors of Vancouver's BC Place opened to a parade of oversized hockey players and gargantuan Mounties surrounded by floating blimp-sized moose and beavers. This was not the closing ceremony of a nation that takes itself too seriously. This was a parody of our national identity in the form of a colossal mobile souvenir stand.

Humour brings humility to temper the flames of nationalism. In fact, it can itself be a friendly way of bonding over-regionalized people. Canada is not our final eschatological community, but we can contribute to making it a taste of God's shalom – for the sake of the globe. That shalom even includes our neighbour-rival, the USA. Ontarian comedian John Wing once said: "a Canadian is merely an unarmed American with health care." Well, now they have health care, too. To commemorate the event, I suggest we make a small, unassuming shrine in Ottawa for the Rev. Tommy Douglas, the nation's #1 Canadian.

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Should the pope confess?

Bert Witvoet

It appears that the Pope is having his own version of an *annus horribilis* in the year of our Lord 2010. Newspapers are filled with news stories, columns and letters – all about the abuse of young children by priests throughout the world. Some of the scandals attach to the church hierarchy, including the Pope, because of alleged cover-ups. Public reaction ranges from outright calls for resignation by the Pope for allegedly having closed his eyes to the severity of the abuses to unwavering support for him because he has allegedly been diligent in punishing the perpetrators.

Personally, I am filled with a deep sadness about all these reports of abuse for several reasons. It is obvious that thousands of young persons have been severely damaged by the immoral conduct of people who are supposed to be their spiritual fathers. I am convinced that the church hierarchy has been far too slow in dealing with this abuse, if they dealt with it at all. I am appalled that known abusers were allowed to continue their sorry behaviour at other postings. And I deeply regret that the witness of the gospel has been seriously damaged.

Biblical support?

I also understand, unfortunately, why the Catholic Church has shown more concern for the reputation of the institution than the welfare of the souls entrusted to it. We have seen the same phenomenon in other church denominations or local churches. It's an attitude that has been with the church and other institutions for centuries. As Cardinal Martins said in a letter to the editor (*National Post*, March 26), "We should not be too scandalized if some bishops knew about [priest pedophilia] but kept it secret. This is what happens in every family; you don't wash your dirty laundry in public." What seems to have escaped the notice of the cardinal is that this dirty laundry is not a private family affair.

I suspect that the church has been guided in these matters, wrongfully I believe, by what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth regarding a sexually immoral brother. Paul advises the church to expel him from their fellowship, and he adds, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" (1 Corinthians 5:12) If you connect this passage with another that follows in chapter 6 of the same letter, where Paul accuses Corinthian believers of trying to settle lawsuits before "the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints," then you can see why the church has developed a hedge mentality when it comes to internal problems. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" writes Paul. "And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?"

We must be careful not to apply Paul's words to all our "dirty laundry." First of all, the word "trivial" does not apply to the abuse of children. Secondly, Paul is talking about legal disputes in chapter 6, disputes that probably have to do with property matters, or civil disputes. Sexual abuse is not a civil matter, nor is it just an internal problem. It is a crime. In such cases we cannot pretend that the "saints" can take care of it without state interference.

Papal peccability

The Pope may have misapplied Paul's advice, too, although he is a first-class scholar of the Bible. He himself is being questioned for what he did or did not do while he was a cardinal in charge of cases of priestly misbehaviour. There is some confusion about whether or not he allowed a priest who had molested some 200 deaf children to live out his frail life "in dignity" without being defrocked. Whether the Pope failed here or the Archbishop of Milwaukee, this is a clear case of minimizing the damage done to children in favour of a priest who had admitted to the abuse but had requested to be spared the indignity of having his ecclesiastical status

Letters

Offended by poem

In spite of your '"editorial caveat'" that introduces the poem "The Gift Wrap" by Jessica Groen (*Christian Courier*, March 2), we find the descriptive language of this poem very distasteful, even offensive and disrespectful. Please, editors, keep the integrity of this Reformed biweekly publication and, above all, maintain reverence and awe for that which is sacred and for him who is holy.

Harry and Henny VanderWindt
Grimsby, Ont.

Sensationalistic romanticism

Allow me to make a few observations about Jessica Groen's "Gift Wrap" (March 22 *CC*), not necessarily in order of importance or logical order.

1. If you want to be realistic in your choice of language, perhaps you should avoid romantic notions of hay and barns. And pigs in Bethlehem?

2. What bothers me personally the most in this poem is the fact that I sense a notion of being sensationalistic or daring on the part of the author, rather than trying to be a blessing to the reader.

3. The other thing that I think the author may have forgotten is the fact that realism does not exclude the right to privacy. I wonder what Joseph and Mary would have written you, if they had read this poem.

4. This poem has not aided me to be more impressed by the humanity of Jesus; that was sufficiently clear beforehand.

Warmest greetings,
John G. Klomps
Mississauga, Ont.

Compelling, inspirational poem

Thank you for finding and sharing Jessica Groen's poem "Gift Wrap" on the back page of *Christian Courier* (March 22). Unexpected metaphors, breathing sights, visual smells . . . we ponder small features which draw attention to the Wonder through whom we shall "be raised imperishable."

Compelling, awe-some, inspirational!

Garth Cubitt
New Lowell, Ont.

The poet's introduction

While of course "Gift Wrap" is a creative work which uses some artistic license, I meant it to honour the Resurrection in a biblical way.

If you are one who likes to make sense of allusive references in a poem, Exodus 39:27-28, Leviticus 8:30, Leviticus 12, Leviticus 15:19-20, Numbers 8:14-19, Psalm 22, Isaiah 51:1-3, Isaiah 54:1, Isaiah 64:6 Jeremiah 20:14-18, John 3:1-16, Acts 2:14-36 Romans 8:18-25, I Corinthians 15, Ephesians 1:4-6, Hebrews 2:10-18, Hebrews 9, I John 2:28-3:3, I John 4:2, Revelation 7:9-17, and Revelation 19:7-16 are helpful places to look for understanding this poem. And, of course, re-read the various accounts of Jesus' birth, death, burial and resurrection from the four Gospels. Enjoy!

May Resurrection News be the Hope that never lets up, lets you go, or lets you down. That barren life-less cave called a Tomb has been miraculously transformed and renamed: Most Fruitful Womb!

Jessica Groen
Hammond, Indiana

Should the pope confess? *continued from page 4*

taken away. (Jesus would have understood if the priest had been thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck! See Luke 17:2) This priest should have been reported to the authorities … appointed by God, Paul would have added (See Romans 13).

But how can the Pope admit to any personal failures *now* while he is considered infallible? Easy. First of all, he was a cardinal when not enough was done to stop the abuse, not a pope. Secondly, papal infallibility applies only to official declarations of doctrine made by the Pope and his council of bishops, not to the Pope's personal behaviour. This is what a Roman Catholic statement about papal infallibility says: "The Catholic Church's teaching on papal infallibility is one which is generally misunderstood by those outside the Church. In particular, Fundamentalists and other 'Bible Christians' [note the disdain in this generalization, Ed.] often confuse the charism of papal 'infallibility' with 'impeccability.' They imagine Catholics believe the pope cannot sin." ("Why Be Catholic?" by Tim Staples; www.catholic.com)

Okay, so now that we have removed this misunderstanding on the part of illiterate non-Catholics, can we now ask the Pope whether it would not be better for him to admit that he or the church he leads sinned when they allowed abusers to die in dignity? Every day that passes without a simple confession "I was wrong" or "We were wrong" diminishes the Pope's moral authority. In the eyes of our society, sin is not as great a "sin" as hypocrisy. By remaining silent and by painting himself as the victim of "petty gossip" the Pope is perpetuating the wrong of the past by allowing the institution to once more triumph over the souls of the wronged.

A note to our readers:

Last year, researchers at Stanford University in California studied the effects of electronic multi-tasking on users in an attempt to determine what benefits people gained from living this way. Benefits? "We didn't find any," writes one of the report's authors; multi-taskers "are suckers for irrelevancy."

We might translate that conclusion into biblical terms as follows: "in an electronic culture in which we have all become multi-taskers, the spiritual gift of wise discernment becomes more and more difficult to exercise well."

Some argue that in an electronic world, print journalism becomes obsolete. The Stanford study tells me that we Christians need wise print media more than ever. I'm thankful that *CC* strives to inform, poke and prod, startle and stretch us to think deeply, discern wisely and debate vigorously. Serving as Spirit-inspired salt and light in our groaning context requires all of these blessings.

I invite you to support *CC* beyond the price of your subscription as a concrete way of asserting the deep value of its discernment-shaping ministry.

Dr. Syd Hielema, Chaplain
Redeemer University College

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Humans and animals are connected

I wish Associate Professor Eikelboom had just gone a little further in his fine column explaining the alignment and differences between animals and humans (CC Mar 22). I find it intriguing that God not only will demand an accounting from us, but that he "will also demand an accounting from every animal" (Gen 9:5b). In addition, when God established his covenant with Noah and us as descendants, the Lord made it a point to state that he was also establishing it with "every living creature on earth" inclusive of "livestock and all the wild animals" (v. 10b, 15, 16). In the context of the article, what do I do with this?

Ralph L. De Groot
Peterborough, Ontario

Hi, Ralph

I like where you are going with this, and the texts you mention are, I think, consistent with my thrust. When books are written about the place of humans in creation and you are limited in a column, often you can only suggest directions that need further exploration.

I remember a great sermon by Calvin Seerveld in our church in Waterloo. He preached on the end of the book of Jonah where God in speaking to Jonah about saving Nineveh speaks about "120,000 who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number." The thought that the children (?) and cattle are combined in God's explanation suggests that the boundary we have placed theologically between animals and humans is porous at least.

As an other example, this porous boundary suggests farming practice may need to be looked at in terms of our stewardly responsibility for creation. But this is an area where I would be poorly positioned to proceed; it quickly becomes very complex.

I think with the current science-religion debates we should be open to opportunities to explore aspects of God's Word that may be more consistent with the findings about God's creation, rather than putting them in conflict with each other.

Rudy Eikelboom

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News

Let Ann Coulter be obnoxious

Jenna Craine

"We should invade their [Islamic] countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war. And this is war."

So said Ann Coulter, the offensive, outlandishly conservative American pundit on September 14, 2001, only days after the terrorist attacks on the United States. The shockingly bigoted language employed by the *New York Times* best-selling author is characteristic. In fact, Coulter has made a living out of publicly lambasting everyone from Muslims to single mothers to 9/11 widows to Jews, but most of all, "whiny" liberals, her sworn enemy.

Now the firebrand has a new target for her ridicule: the University of Ottawa. Her March 23 presentation at the university was shut down when a mob of some 2,000 angry protestors posed a potential threat to Coulter's safety. Following the cancellation, she called the university "bush league" and stated she never receives such treatment, "even at the stupidest American university."

The protest was in the wake of a controversial email from the university's Vice-President Academic and Provost, Francois Houle, to Ms. Coulter. In it, he reminded her prior to her presentation of the existence of Canadian free speech laws, and sent a subtle threat of criminal charges should she speak out of turn at the university. He stated, "you will realize that Canadian law puts reasonable limits on the freedom of expression. For example, promoting hatred against any identifiable group would not only be considered inappropriate, but could in fact lead to criminal charges." The shock-pundit lapped up the email and responded by saying Houle himself was guilty of promoting hatred to an identifiable group – conservatives.

Students protesting the appearance of Ann Coulter at the University of Ottawa.

Yet Houle's warnings to Coulter before she arrived in Canada proved to go unheeded. Following her presentation at the University of Western Ontario, Coulter stated that Muslims should be barred from airlines and use flying carpets instead. When a 17 year-old Muslim student questioned Coulter on this, Coulter suggested she "take a camel."

Missed opportunity

There is no question that Ann Coulter is distasteful to many, and outrageous to others still. Yet in a university setting, where freedom of speech is supposed to be upheld, is it necessary to suppress opinions, even offensive ones? By many accounts, Coulter is more of an entertainment act than a serious political commentator, and her conservatism is so far-fetchedly right-wing as to sound laughable. Surely the University of Ottawa could have proven its worth by attempting to engage in discourse with Coulter. Or if the provocateur was obstinate about entering into any debate, the attending students could have swarmed her intellectually, not physically. Since Coulter's schtick is one of shock sound-bites and *ad hominem* attacks, it would have been very easy for the staff and students to point out the flaws in her thinking, had she been given a chance to speak.

Christian students at the University of Ottawa in particular could have countered Coulter's speech. In one breath she declares, "I'm a Christian first, and a mean-spirited, bigoted conservative second," as though she wishes to embody all that good-willed agnostics despise, and all that a self-proclaimed Christian should *not* be. By questioning Coulter on this, Christians at the University of Ottawa could have shown their distaste for such hypocrisy. Even if she wouldn't give a satisfactory response, the wider community would see that Christians, and perhaps even conservative Christians, don't agree with Coulter on everything.

While the desire to muzzle a woman who is professionally inflammatory is certainly understandable, it was more than fruitless. In fact, the University of Ottawa students' protests, and Francois Houle's cautionary email, only fed Coulter's fame, which devours "liberals" who exhibit any sign of weakness and spits them out for more profit. Since any publicity is good publicity for Ann Coulter, perhaps the single most effective way to protest her presentation would have been an empty auditorium.

Jenna Craine, a wife and mother living in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, is neither a whiny liberal nor an outlandish conservative.

FROM THE LAB
Rudy Eikelboom

Climate change and Christian stewardship

The Copenhagen climate conference this past December ended without substantial progress. The Canadian government has given up on its Kyoto responsibilities. These are events that we as Christians should mourn, pray about, and address. There is considerable agreement among scientists monitoring climate change that human actions are affecting our climate adversely. As Christians we need to be actively involved in the messy process of working to solve these problems.

As stewards of God's creation, we have not always cared for what we have been given as well as we should. In the past this abuse has had only immediate local effects, but this is no longer true. We are told by scientists that humans are now having such a profound effect on God's earth that the climate is being adversely affected. The amount of human-generated carbon dioxide (and other gases) in the atmosphere is increasing and is significantly warming the climate. Climate modeling projections are that the climate change induced by our actions will increase the sea level as the polar ice packs melt, will cause more extreme climate events, and deserts in large parts of the world. All of these consequences will negatively affect the earth's ability to support our current and projected population. Because of our abilities and numbers we truly have become the stewards of God's earth, unfortunately not to creation's benefit.

A difficult problem

This human-induced change in our environment is an issue that governments are attempting to address, but the process is complex. Addressing the problems has adverse consequences for many, and the way we do many things will have to change. These costs will not be equal for everyone. This complexity has created a political minefield that haunts us. We are not doing as well around this issue as we should, and pressure needs to be sustained to ensure further progress.

Part of the issue is that true costs and effects on the environment of the things we do are often not explicitly clarified. We are told to drink water not pop. People are now expressing concern about the plastic water bottles we buy and discard. Rivers that cross borders are sources of dispute; if the upstream country uses the water for irrigation, the downstream country may not have enough water for its cities. Air is free, we think, but, if you take "clean" air and by burning fuel change its composition and increase its carbon dioxide content, you are contributing to global warming. If you use Freon in your air conditioner and some escapes, it ultimately destroys the higher atmosphere, and, consequently, we now live in fear of sunlight.

For "simple" issues like the use of Freon and related chemicals in aerosol cans, there is a technical fix, and the result is the Montreal protocol to ban the use of these agents. Few people were adversely affected by this ban, so it was relatively easy to implement. By way of contrast the true cost of using carbon is high and, if charged to the user, will change our lives in substantial ways.

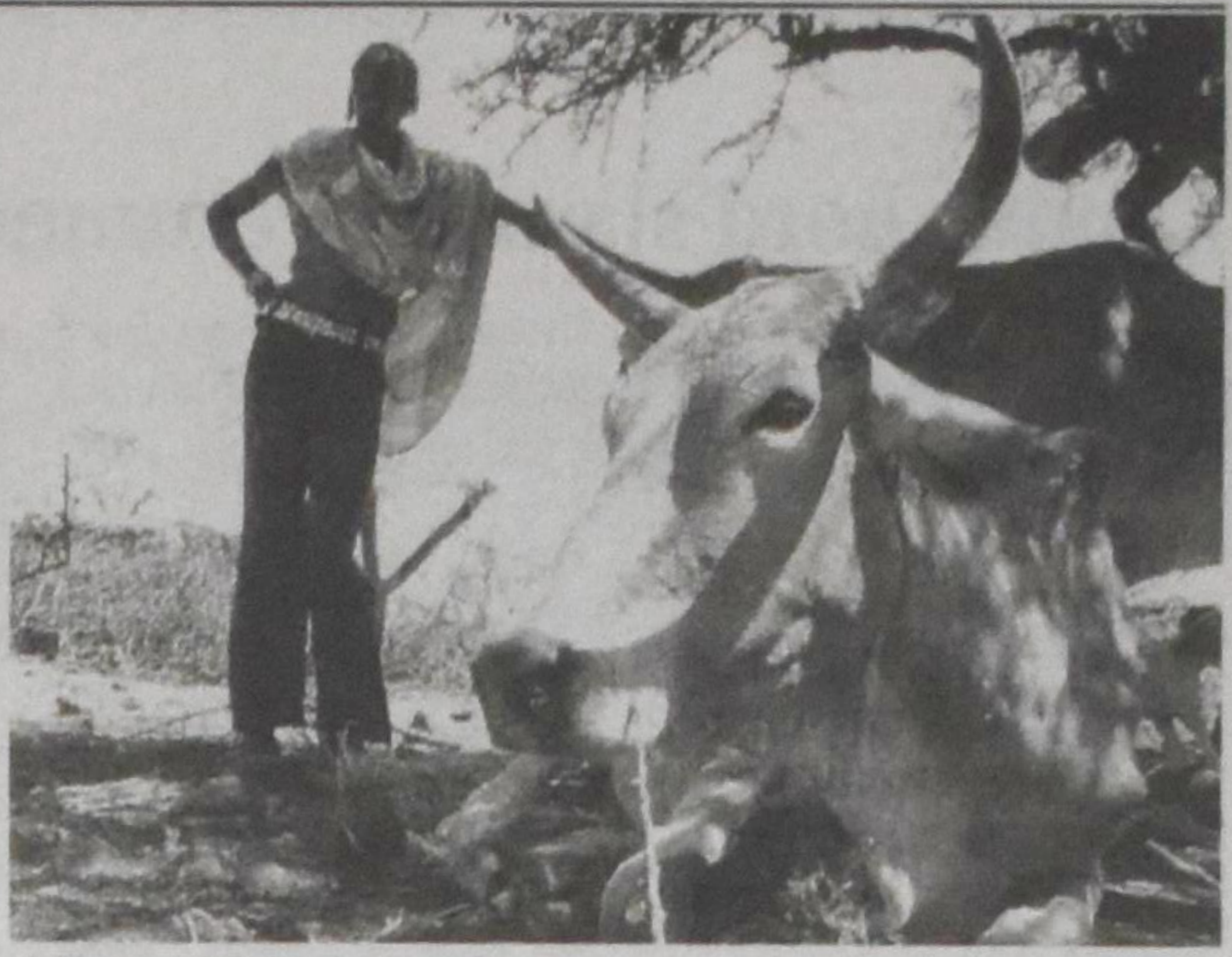
We in the West are seen as having had a free ride in our economic development and as now wanting to charge the developing world for their use of carbon. When the Western economies industrialized, we did not worry about pollution, but now we want to impose strict standards on the developing economies. These countries want us to pay for the benefits the "sins" of our parents have given us. The world we will leave our children is a concern for many, so this is a multi-generational problem. As Christians, preventing this degradation of God's world is something we should be willing to make sacrifices for, in the same way we are willing to sacrifice for the needs of others.

These discussions are difficult, and as humans we sometimes do not act in good faith. This leads to the smear campaigns and the attempts to avoid this issue that we sometimes see in the public media. Many believe that for oil, where the true air costs of this product are not currently included in our economic models, we are in denial about the problem. But personally I am also reluctant to include the true cost of driving my car in these discussions. As children of our Father, the Creator, we need to repent for this sort of response and change. Christians should be at the forefront of these difficult political issues: this is God's world.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

News

Farm aid from space



A Kenyan Masai farmer shows cows exhausted by lack of nutrition.

Jina Moore

Nairobi, KENYA (CSM) – Dusty northern Kenya doesn't look like a laboratory, but across its dry plains, cattle herders are pioneering a new way to fend off poverty and teaming up with unlikely partners – insurance agents.

The two groups have been brought together by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), headquartered in Kenya's capital, Nairobi. A few years ago, scientists at ILRI wondered if a new innovation, called weather-indexed insurance, might help impoverished cattle farmers survive the loss of their cows during times of drought.

Satellite data of climate activity enables remote herders to obtain drought insurance.

Weather-indexed insurance has been around for about six years. Like all insurance, the idea is to mitigate risk. Think of homeowner's insurance: A homeowner pays premiums so that, if a pipe bursts, the insurance company will reimburse her – after they've verified the damage, of course.

For the cattle, camel, and goat herders in Marsabit, a dry part of Kenya that shares a border with Ethiopia, animals are assets. Their sale can bring the income a family needs to survive, and a big herd, like a big house, is a store of wealth that can be useful collateral for credit, which analysts often say is key to pulling people out of poverty. At minimum, losing a cow is a devastating financial blow.

That's the kind of risk that insurance can defray, but insurance agents aren't going to travel to Marsabit to verify cattle deaths.

Enter weather-indexed insurance, which changes the way the damage is verified for everything from cattle to crops.

Data gathered by 'moving stars'

In Kenya, satellites measure the greenness level on the ground. Andrew Mude, one of the chief scientists with ILRI, says that greenness is "a very good predictor for us of . . . the nutrition available for livestock."

The index is maintained by NASA, which has been using satellites to take pictures of the area since 1980. For $10, a farmer in the driest part of the district can insure one cow. If grass levels fall below a certain point, the herder gets a payment of $200 per insured cow. Mude expects herders to insure about 50 percent of their herd in this pilot year.

Meanwhile, the policies might help farmers fend off poverty. Crops insured against loss can be used as collateral for loans, and loans can be used to buy better seeds or invest in equipment. A combination insurance and loan program in Malawi helped MicroEnsure's clients increase yields by up to 200 percent, says Mr. Mapfumo, VP of the insurance company.

"Because of that, we found that some of them were even able to buy new assets," he says. "One of our clients, the year before we had him, he was living in a mud house. The following year, he was able to build a structure with a corrugated iron roof. It really remade his life."

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

Bread from the dump

I've always appreciated rough-hewn Elijah. A man of direct speech:

"No rain for your kingdom until God says so."

"Look, your son is alive."

". . . you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire – he is God."

"I have had enough, LORD."

". . . you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD," say Elijah after Ahab had stolen Naboth's vineyard. "Oh, and by the way, "Jezebel, your wife? She's Rottweiler chow. See you. . . ."

I don't envy Elijah his diet, however. In particular, when he fled to the Cherith Ravine, we're told he was fed by ravens, which "brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening."

I've always wondered about that. Did the ravens steal some flatbread and retreat to the sounds of the curses of a Hebrew wife? Perhaps the ravens flew to the local landfill and scrounged around for some beautiful bread: beautiful because it was striped and stippled with orange and green moulds. And what about the meat? I know too much about road kill and ravens to be enthusiastic about maggoty sheep stew. Perhaps these were especially fastidious ravens that only dealt with clean, fresh stolen food. At any rate, the fact that the ravens brought the food is no less a miracle than that Elijah survived it. In my opinion.

Those were Elijah's ravens. "Mine" don't feed my face but do feed my curiosity. Crows (a flock is called a *murder of crows*) get lots of press for their brains, their destructiveness, their social dynamics. For me, a pair of ravens (or a flock, called *an unkindness of ravens*) are more interesting still.

Crows may be smart; tame crows can be taught to repeat a few words, but ravens speak their own language. Some observers report that ravens make as many as 64 different vocalizations. Richard N. Conner (1985) studied raven vocalizations in Virginia during the 1970's. He recorded 1,210 vocalizations and identified eighteen call types. Conner speculates that "different call types were associated with excitement, agonistic interactions, aggression, alert, courtship, submission, and thwarting."

Some of these calls Conner names the *caw* (obviously), the *whine, cawlup, rattle, ko-pick,* and the *kow.*

He likens other sounds to those made by a xylophone or bell "that is struck while being held to prevent continued ringing." To me it sounds like a marble rattling around in a tin can. It's my favourite raven-call.

Where did all these sticks come from?

Ravens in myth

There are whole mythologies that feature ravens. Northwest B.C. aboriginal peoples portray raven as a Trickster, paralleling in some ways the stories about Coyote from inland areas. Two ravens served the Norse god Odin acting as his scouts and – presumably – counsellors. Their names, *Huginn and Muninn* (Thought and Memory) reveal something about Norse opinions of ravens.

Ravens, while often associated with wilderness, have adapted well to human settlement. In Inuvik, Northwest Territories, ravens frequent the dump along with bears and foxes. Inuvik ravens must be the largest of the subspecies. I've observed them in August, not their best time. The huge adults were moulting, sitting on ledges and under overhanging roofs, trying to find a little shade. I suppose that twenty-four hours of sun must tax even their otherwise boundless energies. To me, anyway, they looked plumb worn out.

Dumps aren't the only places ravens find food. They eat road-kill of any size: small (songbirds struck alongside the highway) and great (dead deer and moose). The mighty raven will also pick up seeds beneath my bird feeder and worms exposed by the plough.

In my opinion, the raven is also one of the best predators. They eat mice and voles and baby rabbits. One raven speciality is nestlings. I watched a raven investigate a copse of trees near Highway 16; when it discovered a robin's nest it grabbed a baby and with one *gulp* had a snack, much to the dismay of the robin parents. I've watched ravens hunt tadpoles in one of my small ponds that was drying up, exposing the potential frogs and toads to raven sight.

In the wild ravens nest on big trees and – especially – on cliffs and ledges. "Our" ravens have decided that the peak of the open hay barn is close enough to a ledge to qualify. One neighbour remarked, "Their nest looks like a beaver house up there." That's because the foundation and outer structure is built completely of dead branches, in this case cottonwood and aspen branches.

With two hands you may try to make a nest on a beam, but I suspect you will drop a few before everything is in balance and interwoven enough to form a stable platform. Ravens – with two feet and a big, honkin' beak, have trouble, too. I wondered why there was a huge pile of sticks on the hay barn floor. Then I looked up and saw the raven nest. I wondered how many sticks were in the nest, but I didn't think I'd want to climb up there. I settled for counting the number of sticks that fell to the ground: 417. That says something about raven building sense, persistence, or determination.

In spring and fall, we sometimes get beautiful, sunny days with strong updrafts. That's the time we watch eagles float effortlessly higher and higher, barely in sight. Looking through the binoculars one day, I saw six specks even higher than the eagles. Ravens.

Elijah's ravens provided him with food. I'm sure he was thankful for them? Did they also talk to him? Did they perform aerial stunts? Did they arouse his curiosity? His wonder? Awe? Praise?

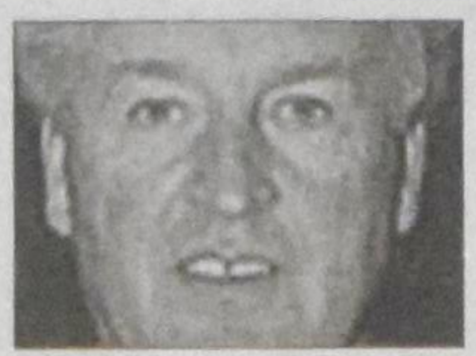
Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) lives in Telkwa, B.C. He occasionally gleans, but doesn't frequent dumpsters. He occasionally soars.

Church

Labour Lord slams government anti-Christian attitude

LONDON (TCI) – Veteran British Labour Peer Lord Donoughue has said he is "ashamed" of the "intolerant bigotry" toward Christians that exists in his own party and others.

Labour's "disgraceful" law forcing religious adoption agencies to consider same-sex couples as parents is an example of its hostility to traditional beliefs, said Donoughue, who served as a policy adviser to two Prime Ministers in the 1970s. Observers called Donoughue's remarks an embarrassing blow to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who called churchgoers "the conscience of our country" in his Easter message.



Lord Donoughue.

In a letter to *The Tablet*, a weekly Roman Catholic magazine, Lord Donoughue wrote, "The present situation sadly reflects the extent to which many among the politically correct zealots in all parties now display the same kind of intolerant bigotry towards Christian faith which once was regrettably shown towards the homosexual minority. As a life-long member of the Labour party, I am ashamed of its present actions."

The Labour Peer also attacked the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats for lacking courage and sympathy on the issue of Roman Catholic adoption agencies. "I trust that during the election campaign and with the new government, all the Christian churches will unite to campaign more actively hitherto to defend the Christian faith from the attacks of the politically correct and the intolerant."

In October 2009, Minister for Communities John Denham denied that Christians in Britain are being marginalized at the hands of the Labour government. He insisted to a group of church leaders that neither faith nor believers were being sidelined. Denham describes himself as a secular humanist. "Coming into this job I thought it would be of interest to me certainly and, I hope, to you to explore the relationship between faith and government from that perspective," he said. "It would be wrong to suggest that faith organizations alone are responsible for defining, shaping and transmitting values. It is not necessary to have faith to be deeply, morally and profoundly altruistic."

Aggressive secularism

Earlier that same month Baroness Warsi, the shadow minister for community cohesion, accused the government of allowing intolerance against Christians to grow. Speaking at the Conservative Party conference, she said, "Under Labour, the state has become increasingly skeptical of an individual's religious belief. We've all seen the stories – how appalling that today in Labour's Britain a community nurse can be suspended for offering to pray for a patient's good health. How awful that a school receptionist could face disciplinary action for sending an email to her friends simply asking them to pray for her daughter. At the heart of these cases lies a growing intolerance and illiberal attitude towards those who believe in God," she said.

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair warned UK Christians in March last year that they now live in an age of "aggressive secularism." He criticized recent "ludicrous decisions" which saw Christians punished for expressing their beliefs. In the same month, his wife, Cherie Blair, said, "Christians are often being marginalized and faith is something few people like to discuss openly."

CRC/RCA launch joint media program exploring Scripture

PALOS HEIGHTS, Ill (CRCNA) – Since April 18, North American listeners have had a new discipleship program to help them grow in their faith: Groundwork.

ReFrame Media (the English-language ministry of Back to God Ministries International) and Words of Hope (the media ministry of the Reformed Church in America) have combined resources to launch "Groundwork," a new half-hour audio program that teaches the Christian faith. Recognizing the changing listening needs of today's audiences, the programs known as The Back to God Hour and Words of Hope have been reformatted and combined under a new name.

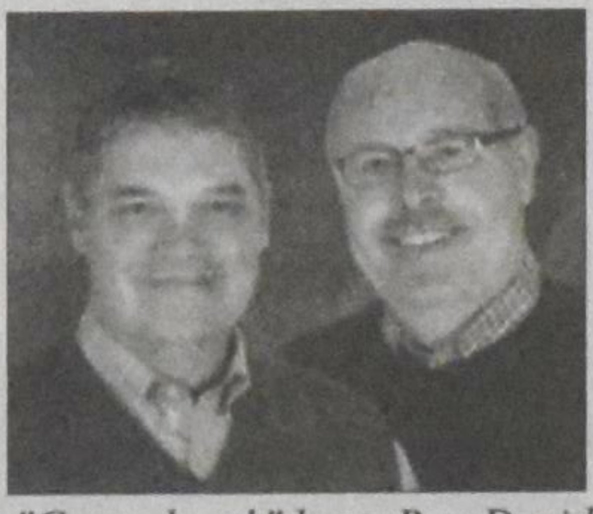
Groundwork, hosted by Rev. David Bast (of Words of Hope) and Rev. Robert Heerspink (of Back To God Ministries International), explores Scripture in depth from a Reformed perspective. It puts Dave and Bob into the studio for a relaxed, conversational approach to teaching.

"Groundwork is meant to turn the soil of Scripture and cultivate growth in faith and obedience," says Heerspink. "We're excited about a program that continues the teaching ministry of The Back to God Hour, but in a format that will attract new listeners. Both Back to God Ministries International and Words of Hope have a deep commitment to the Reformed faith and have aired separate teaching programs for years. Together, we'll multiply the impact of our work and strengthen our stewardship of resources."

Direct connection with listeners

"Listeners use audio quite differently than they did 25 years ago," said ReFrame Director Rev. Steven Koster, who also serves as Groundwork's executive producer. "Now more than ever media is a relationship tool." So Groundwork is structured to not only "encourage and educate," but to connect more directly with listeners.

Those "connections" include an online forum for listeners to share ideas and questions for upcoming programs, a Facebook page, a Twitter feed, a smart phone application, and a website section devoted to listener prayer requests.



"Groundwork" hosts Rev. David Bast and Rev. Robert Heerspink.

"We are working to broadcast Groundwork on many of the same stations that currently air The Back to God Hour and Words of Hope, and 50 radio outlets have already committed to airing Groundwork," notes Koster. "Fans of The Back to God Hour will still be able to access archived programs on BackToGodRadio.net."

Before Groundwork launched on the 18th, the April 11 episode of The Back to God Hour looked back on 70 years of media ministry, then forward to the new Groundwork format.(A CD copy of this commemorative program can be had by emailing ReFrame Ministries at info@reframe-media.com or by calling 1-800-879-6555.)

"We are indebted to the legacy that has gone before us and for how God has ministered to so many lives through The Back to God Hour," says Koster. "This is not so much an ending as a continuation of our Bible-teaching tradition for the media landscape in the 21st century. We are excited for this new opportunity to reach even more lives with the Gospel."

BTGMI and Words of Hope also partner in Spotlight (an English as a Second Language international program), in Arabic-language outreach throughout the Middle East, and through a new partnership in India.

Conference looks at Canadian trends in religion

Marian Van Til, *with files from mySteinbach.ca and EFC*

STEINBACH, Manitoba – A March 25 conference for ministry and business leaders sponsored by Providence College and Seminary and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) examined "being evangelical in a complex world." The topic addressed "how we link our understanding of societal trends with our faith in God's purposes and translate it into action," said Charlene de Haan, manager of educational services for the EFC.

Specifically, featured speaker Rick Hiemstra presented data related to church and religion trends in Canada. Hiemstra is the director of EFC's Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism. The centre tracks trends in both Canadian society at large and in Canadian evangelicalism.

A notable trend Hiemstra reported is that immigrants are having a strong impact on Canada's religion demographics. He noted that the number of teenagers who identify with a non-Christian religion is rising, and so is the percentage of teens that do not identify with any religion.

Hiemstra also reported that the number of Canadians identifying themselves as either Protestants or Catholics is declining. But teenagers who say they are Protestants are actually more involved in church and more committed than many adults are.

Other conference topics included charitable giving, volunteering and social networking. There were two other speakers: Don Hutchinson and Aileen Van Ginkel. Hutchinson is EFC's general legal counsel and director of the Centre for Faith and Public Life. Van Ginkel is vice president of Ministry Services for the EFC. About 30 people attended the conference, mostly from Winnipeg and southern Manitoba.

Canadian hierarchy knew of Vatican official's abuse

OTTAWA (Catholic Culture) – Seven Ontario bishops and Cardinal José Sanchez, the prefect for the Congregation for the Clergy, were aware by 1993 that the secretary-general of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith had committed sexual abuse, according to a February 1993 letter from the bishop of Pembroke, Ontario, to Canada's apostolic nuncio.

At the time of Monsignor Bernard Prince's 1991 appointment to the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith, Bishop Joseph Windle of Pembroke was aware that the priest had abused one boy. Nonetheless, he recalled in the 1993 letter that "while the charge against Fr. Prince was very serious," he had not objected "to him being given another chance since it would remove him from the Canadian scene."

By 1993, however, Bishop Windle had become aware that there were four or five victims. In his letter to Archbishop Carlo Curis, who served as apostolic nuncio to Canada from 1990 to 1999, Bishop Windle urged that Father Prince not be given a papal honor or promoted to the episcopate, noting that such a move could prompt victims to speak out publicly.

Monsignour Bernard Prince today (above) and in 1979 (below).

Three months after he wrote the letter, Bishop Windle retired at age 75; he died in 1997. The *Globe and Mail* notes that Bishop Windle, contrary to the policy adopted by Canadian bishops in 1993, did not report the abuse to civil authorities.

Msgr. Prince continued to serve as secretary-general of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith until 2004. Laicized by Pope Benedict in 2009, Prince is currently serving a four-year prison term after being convicted of sexually abusing 13 young men between 1964 and 1984. The victims were between 10 and 16 years old.

Debate

Belhar Confession debated

Part IV

Is the Belhar distinctively Reformed enough in theology to be a Reformed confession or is it too ecumenical in its theology? If we don't need to be distinctively Reformed in theology, then is there another way to say that the Belhar is Reformed?

In 1982, a Reformed church in Belhar, a suburb of Cape Town in South Africa, wrote a confession of faith that focused on social justice issues that arose around apartheid. Since then, the Belhar Confession has been accepted by some African and European Reformed churches as equal to the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism. In July, the Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) accepted it as a fourth confession and the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) voted by 72% to propose the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity at Synod 2012.

Christian Courier asked Dr. John Bolt and Shiao Chong to respond to the Belhar's consideration by answering six questions posed by the editorial team in a series of six features over three months.

John Bolt

This fourth question raises the stakes of our discussion in a number of ways; we are now tackling the heart of Reformed identity. Why did the Belhar Confession press itself on the agenda of Reformed churches rather than that of, let us say, Lutheran Churches? Are unity, reconciliation, or liberation from suffering and oppression uniquely Reformed issues requiring a Reformed confession? Hardly; the American civil rights movement, the World Council of Churches' Program to Combat Racism, and Roman Catholic Latin American liberation theology prove the point. Arminianism is a Reformed issue; racism is everyone's issue.

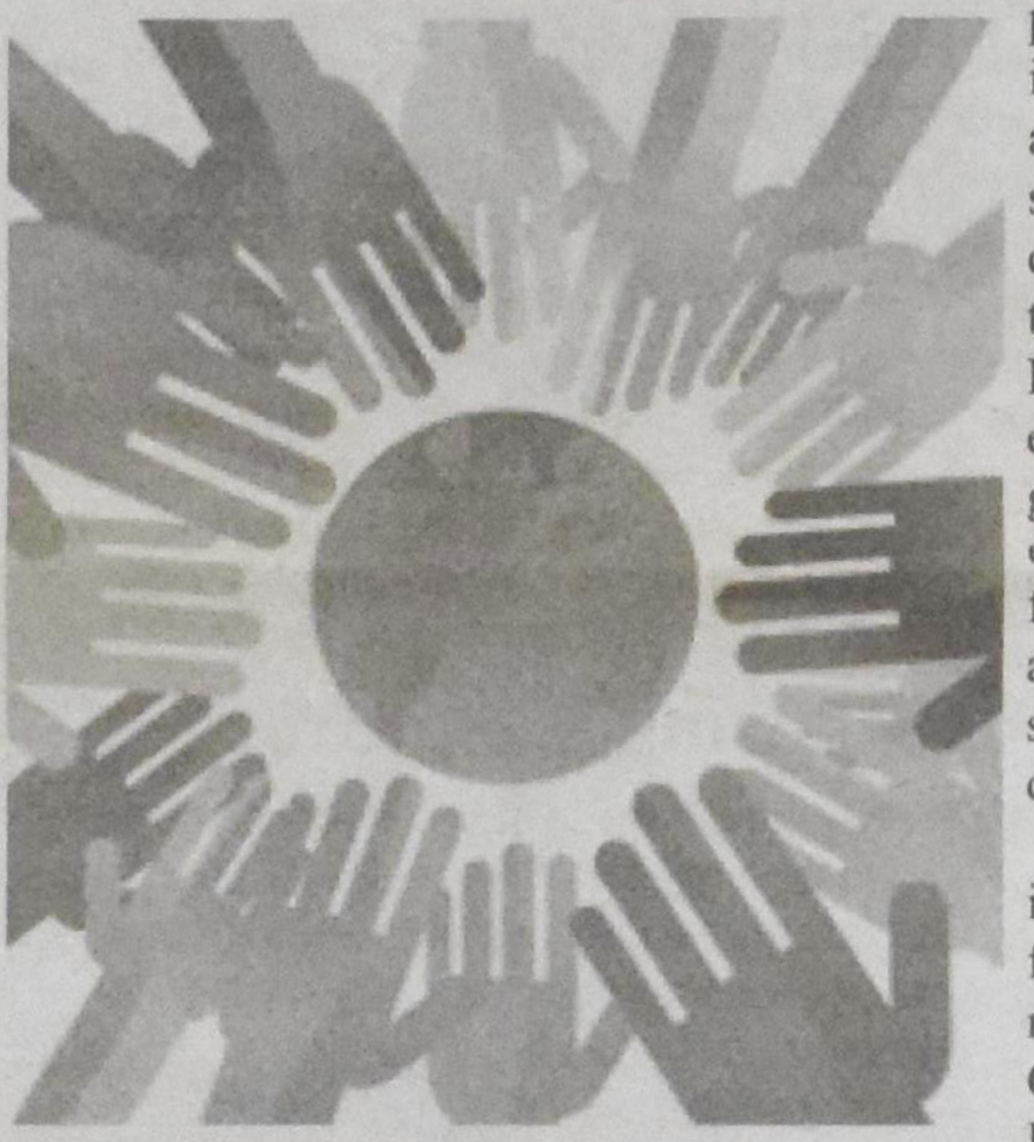
Except for one thing. Belhar is not on our Reformed agenda so much because of its theological content but because it is a judgment directed *by* Reformed churches *against* one of its own, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. We need to catch our breath here, name the elephant in the room and publicly state what many are thinking but not eager to say out loud: Belhar is a *political* confession using *theological* language.

Acknowledging this is the only way to make sense of the frustration experienced at the 2009 CRC synod when *theological* objections to Belhar repeatedly met *political* rejoinders. Belhar, we were told, is a gift from the black South African Reformed churches that it would be churlish to refuse. Implicitly and explicitly we were given the clear message: to turn down Belhar would prove to the world, and especially to people of colour, that the CRC was not prepared to shed its own legacy of racism. That such arguments are unfair, quite unecclesiastical, and impossible to counter – like the classic, "have you stopped beating your wife" – is somewhat beside the point. They are not theological arguments at all; they are political.

Political intent

The second half of the fourth question we were asked by the editors of *Christian Courier* is then easy enough to answer. Belhar is "Reformed" because it deals with a political struggle within the family of Reformed churches. That's it and that's all. Now whether that is sufficient to elevate it to the status of a permanent confession for the ages like the Belgic Confession is another matter. I doubt it.

A couple of additional observations are in order. Recognizing that Belhar is a political statement using theological language helps us understand why its first two articles are so much more acceptable than the third and especially fourth articles. Belhar gets increasingly political and less theological in its specificity as it unfolds. It also explains why the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, renowned for its leftist political activism but hardly for its concern with finer points of Reformed doctrine, helped give birth to Belhar, sponsored and nurtured its passage into the worldwide Reformed community, and continues as its chief cheerleader. While Belhar is far superior to WARC's more recent Accra Confession (note the language!), adopted by WARC's 24th General Council in 2004, which declares that working to create a more just economy is essential to the integrity of Christian faith, it is of the same genre. The similarity here consists of making a political position, framed by theological language, an essential of the Christian (and Reformed) faith. This move is unprecedented in the Christian church's confessional tradition.



Worldview theology?

Finally, the question as formulated at the top of this essay differs somewhat from the original question posed to the writers by the editors and is the product of some discussion among us. The intent was something I recognize from many previous conversations I have had over the years with friends who call themselves "Reformational" and arises from their concerns about theological imperialism. They want to think of Reformed not so much in theological, doctrinal, or ecclesiastical terms but in terms of worldview, notably a worldview framed by the concepts Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation.

I understand and laud the desire to think about being a Reformed Christian beyond the walls of the church; indeed that desire and passion is a hallmark of the Reformed faith. Still, there are two – and in my judgment, insurmountable – problems with this argument.

1. When it comes to the Belhar this is an attempt to have one's cake and eat it too.

...See **Bolt** on page 15

Shiao Chong

In order to determine if the Belhar Confession is "distinctively Reformed" in its theology, we need to first define what counts as Reformed theology, as opposed to Lutheran or Roman Catholic theology. This is not as easy as it sounds. When we survey the writings of prominent Reformed theologians across time and space, we find that "Reformed theology appears to be not one, but rather a plurality of different theological positions."[1] There is no consensus among Reformed scholars as to what counts as "distinctively Reformed." Hence, I will operate with some general themes or emphases of Reformed theology and worldview instead of any specific doctrines.

On the face of it, the Belhar Confession does not read like the Belgic Confession or the Heidelberg Catechism. It lacks their comprehensive range of doctrines and detailed definitions of key theological concepts. However, the Belhar was not written to *replace* the Belgic Confession or the Heidelberg Catechism but to *supplement* them. Hence, there is no need to rehash all the doctrinal details that were already well covered by the so-called Three Forms of Unity. Therefore, on a first reading, the Belhar sounds like a generic ecumenical confession and not very Reformed at all. It doesn't, for instance, spell out the rallying slogans of "Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone" (in Latin: *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fides*) of the Protestant Reformation, like the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism do.

Reformed framework

But although the Belhar does not explicitly mention such Reformed emphases or themes, it seems to assume those themes as foundational; it works out of a framework laid down by the Three Forms of Unity and other typical Reformed commitments. For example, in article 1, the Belhar states: "We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end." This is a clear reference to the Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 54 (Lord's Day 21): "I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith." The Belhar intentionally roots itself in the lineage of the early Reformed confessions.

Secondly, the Belhar assumes that Scripture alone is the authority for what the church believes. Its structure is similar to that of the Canons of Dordt. Articles 2-4 of the Belhar begin by affirming biblical doctrines with scriptural references and then rejecting errors that are contrary to those biblical doctrines. The Belgic Confession also has a similar structure in many of its articles. It is a formula that Reformed confessions habitually use as a way to work out of a *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) principle. Furthermore, the Bible is full of references of God caring for the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger – from the Old Testament prophets to Jesus (e.g. Luke 4:14-21) and the apostles (e.g. James 1:27-2:7). Hence, it is not a stretch to say that the Belhar's commitment to God's justice in article 4 is working out of a commitment to Scripture's authority.

Christ-centered focus

Thirdly, the theme of salvation by God's grace alone is also assumed throughout the Belhar. For example, it is the triune God who gathers the church through Word and Spirit (article 1). The Christian unity from Christ's reconciling work is "both *a gift* and an obligation for the church" (article 2). Christ has *already conquered* the sin of separation and hatred between people and groups (article 2). God's Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death and will enable the church to live in new obedience (article 3). These affirmations are based on an understanding that it is God's gracious mercy and not our efforts that brings about victory over sin and renewal of life.

Fourthly, the Belhar also works out of the Reformed emphasis of *sola fides* (salvation by faith alone). Under article 3, it affirms "that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church." In the 16th century Reformation, the fear is that salvation and justification, and, hence, church membership will be made condition-

...See **Chong** on page 15

UNDERSTANDING 'BIRDCALLS'

Ferenc Költemeny writes about a poem by Frank Sawyer

In his recently published volume of poetry, Frank Sawyer presents us with a selection of his poems arranged under the categories of Nature, Latin America, Seascape, Reflections, and Faith. He tells me that many of these poems were once already seen within the pages of CC, but just between you and me, he admits having honed them – some lightly and some very strenuously. That is, he changed a few words in some, some lines in others, and whole stanzas in a few.

My intention was to write a full review, but that is a formidable task. The verses he presents are sometimes appear simple, but just as often they are complex, with subtle connotations. His introduction is helpful, for he mentions things about how to read a poem. Actually he told me the other day that he has received more positive comments on the introduction than on what followed. But having read past the introduction, I abandoned my overly ambitious a project. I will settle for the moment with introducing one poem only. It deals with winter, but it is timely as a perennial comment on our search for reality.

Having said that, I have already revealed my understanding of the main theme of the poem, namely a search for reality among virtual signs and shadows. The idea of virtual reality is not new at all; it existed long before our electronic media age.

Colour

What is it that strikes the reader as we walk into the poem? There is a sudden contrast:

> The woods were black
> the woods were white

This is so different than many other Sawyer poems, where colours dominate, sometimes unnoticed. At times they are quite pleasing, but at others bitter to the poetic tongue, as are some of his half-rhymes. As one leafs through this lilac-coloured book, one 'sees,' perhaps as a new way of seeing, motley colours including "mauve-blue" and "pastel glories," silver, green-black, a mixture of green and turquoise, light that "gilds" and so forth. However, it is not a matter of listing colours, but rather of seeing the way the poems give a special role to different colours.

Thus, to begin with the first poem, which bears the same name as the book title, "A Way of Seeing," he says:

> ….the sun
> for a moment allows
> its last colours somehow
> one by melting one
> to rest amid the shadows

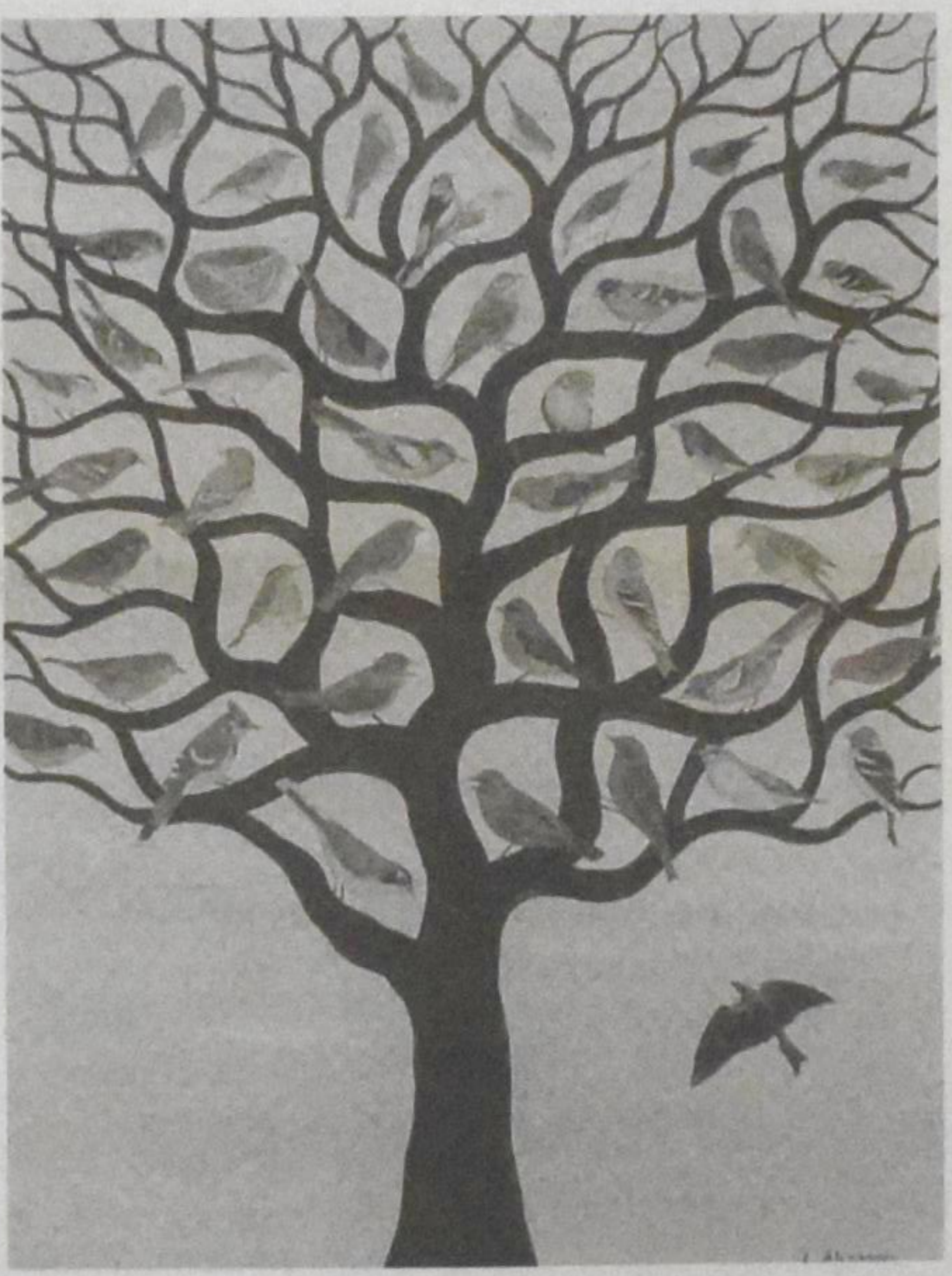
Or, in a poem called "Lure":

> the water reflecting
> deep under the algae
> the colours and forms
> of a pure nostalgia

And again, in "The Autumn Hunt":

> …all the fallen fruit,
> the chosen culled colours of autumn
> the reds, ochres, purples as a tasty
> palette
> gleaming in the basket

So I believe the reader will agree that not only are colours important to the poet but the emotional values they hold. Each colour indeed holds its own value. Each colour says something different. We all know that some colours are warm and some cold, some flat or sharp (to borrow an idea from music), and some sour or sweet (to borrow from our taste buds). The more I envisioned some of these colours, including the combinations, like "green-black islands/rugged in the sea," the more I seemed to enter each poem. I would be happy to take the ferry to Victoria to experience these green-blacks. It depends on the time of year, even the time of day, what colours are seen.



Meanwhile, back at the studio

> The woods were black
> the woods were white
> in November the snow

What we know already is that this will be a poem of shadows, light and dark – at best some silver, but no real colour. However, what may seem cold and harsh, lonely and forsaken (as we shall see), may already be perceived as full of divine grace. I present this proposition quite confidently, because both snow and grace are dominant concepts in his poems – that is, in combination with each other. After all, the first poem ends with the phrase "grace deep and bold." We find grace mentioned in relation to snow in "Old and New," where we hear that "the falling snow baptizes us in white." This is also said in only half-hidden terms in "Regained," where the snow falls in flakes "like a white fishnet" and people's faces are "full of joy and song." The title might as well be "Reborn," as "Regained." This is one way of unpacking Sawyer's connotations, and the whole deck of poetic cards seems to interrelate more than I at first realized. For we also read about "white promises/glazing the steeple/and amazing the world" in the poem called "A Sermon." Snow is full of divine promise.

Let us take a bigger step up the ladder of "Birdcalls":

> in November the snow
> and shadows playing
> havoc with my memory
> the birdcalls jarring flakes
> from silver branches

What should a willing reader hear or see in these lines? I confess I found them jarring. Of course, the word "jarring" ensures that. But it is also because what sounds friendly (the word "playing") turns in the next line to be an affront ("playing havoc"). And with "my memory!" That is disconcerting. If our memory goes, or is mixed up, we lose our orientation, since I think present and future do not exist in our mind without a clear view of our past. But what is it that plays havoc with our memories? Birdcalls. The poem does not say which birds; indeed, the birds are not seen, only heard. A way of seeing is sometimes only a way of hearing.

The sound of unseen birds

Which birds? That would make a great difference. A crow call is not the same as the nightingale's song; the sound of a goose honking is not like the cuckoo's song. Birds and birdcalls have their meanings: the dove stands for love or peace, an owl for wisdom. However the call of the owl in west coast Indian lore was the call of death, as a famous novel explains: *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*. The cry of the seagull stands for freedom in Sawyer's "Seascape" poem.

We do not know which birds the poem refers to. Certainly winter birds. If we knew the kind of woods, for example deciduous trees or evergreens, we might select some possible birds. But the kind of woods or leaves is not mentioned. This is typical of Sawyer's via negative, or as the mystics said, the path of leaving out of the picture more and more to find the centre or depth or ground of all being in its wholeness and purity. Such mysticism goes beyond my reach, but I feel that Sawyer at times purposely does not tell us things that would help us know what he means. I call this the mystical element in his poems, which I think appears often just when we are looking for the definite meaning of his lines.

So, all we can ask is, what is the function of the (unknown) birdcalls in this poem? Let us keep them in context:

> the birdcalls jarring flakes
> from silver branches
> and in between the silence
> while looking back
> I saw my footprints fade
> among the silhouettes
> separating the past
> from the future

Of course the reader will likely notice that the phrase "in between the silence" is ambiguous, since it could mean that the silence is felt in between the silver branches, so that empty space is like silence. It also means that there were birdcalls and there were moments or times of silence in between these calls. Both could be true, because the poem is layered, piling meaning upon meaning, all in the search for meaning.

What is happening while the birds call? We are told that the footprints fade. Notice again the virtual reality language: birdcalls, but no birds seen; footprints, but not the feet themselves; silhouettes rather than the clear view of the solid trees; silence rather than words of another or even one's own thoughts expressed; and neither past nor future present, but only fading footprints "separating the past from the future." This is a lonely path of not knowing where one is going, a moment or extended time of decision. I envision the walker in the woods to be lonely and forsaken. But as the saying goes, homo viator, we are always travellers, even pilgrims. And so:

> pushing me forward
> while the birdcalls
> break the silence

Interestingly, the footprints push the poet – or whomever we may presume the walker in the woods to be – forward. A look back somehow takes one forward. In this case it seems perhaps out of the fear of being lost in the woods and shadows. The need to find one's way pushes one forward. When I asked Sawyer if he wrote this as a young man, he replied that it was about a young man but written many years later after a return of the experience. This confirmed my gradual understanding.

If a repetition of words is significant, then we should notice that the words repeated in this short poem, are two: "birdcalls" and "silence." And the word

The meditative blank space around poetry

Bert Witvoet

Frank Sawyer's poems and writings have often graced the pages of *Christian Courier*, ever since I have been editor. I used to get them sent to me from Tegulcigalpa in Honduras, where Frank taught at a seminary, and from Sharospatak, Hungary, where he now is professor at the seminary of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Frank is a Canadian, who has lived in the Netherlands, and is quite fluent in English, Dutch, Spanish and Hungarian. I have always appreciated the thoroughly Reformed perspective of Frank, as well as his sensitive view of things. And then there is his artistic side, evident in paintings and poetry. Just recently Frank has published a 73-page collection of poems in what he has called *A Way of Seeing*, beautifully adorned on the front cover with one of his nature aquarelles.

Let me quote extensively from his introduction to that booklet as a way of entering the mind of our cosmopolitan friend.

A fair bit of inaction

"Poetry is a way of seeing. Is that really true?

Is it not better to say that a way of seeing is applied in poetry, as it is in every other part of life? That, of course, is also the case. However, I do think that poetry in itself can be called a way of seeing. This involves both form and attitude.

We all know that there is a way of defining poetry by pointing to rhyme and rhythm (the classical model). There are also plenty of experiments in poetry which dispense with either or both of these characteristics. Then poetry is still recognizable because it leaves more blank paper in its vicinity than prose does. The blank areas on a page of poetry help us to concentrate on fewer words, in comparison again to prose.

"But I want to say that beyond the various forms of poetry there is also the attitude, which is essentially a short meditation on a theme. By "short" I mean the compact words and lines which are stylised to offer more than they say. Good poetry has both form and content. Both of these are arrived at during the "essential meditation." To speak of meditation reminds us that not everything in life is achieved by action (that is, movement and power). Poetry is obviously also an action, but it involves a meditative attitude of observing, listening, and reflecting. It involves a generous amount of inaction. I could have called [my] little collection a way of listening. However, to the extent that poetry is also action, I speak of a way of seeing.

Reading aloud

"Reading poetry is an interesting task. The silent reader may siphon out much of the meaning according to the rhythm and rhyme, the sound and details, heard as it were in the inner ear and echoed in the mind or heart. The oral reader discovers a formidable task, which often eludes the silent reader: where to pause, where to whisper, where to exclaim, where to change the tone? It takes a few readings indeed to get the feel of a poem and to interpret each line, thought, tone, and meaning. So while a first level of approaching written poetry is that of the silent reader, a second level is entered when poetry is read aloud as drama and as a form of entertainment. A third level is achieved when it is sung, as done in many kinds – popular, classic, as well as in civic events and in worship. In these and other ways poetry is always with us.

"However, whether read silently or aloud or sung, a poem can be read in more than one way. A more hasty or slow, cheerful or serious, questioning or emphatic, prosaic or dramatic approach leads to a different kind of reading. A poem has more than one layer of meaning, and also more than one way of interpretation. Poetry usually has more than one thing to say, and what is said or merely indicated or even left in silence can make all the difference.

Understanding a culture

"For the reader of the poems presented [in my booklet], all of the above can help deepen one's approach.... Most of my poems are meant to begin a thought pattern rather than end one's thinking.

Poetry has a special pace in my life. First of all, I suppose, because I have scribbled poems for many years. Secondly, I have read poetry in several languages while living in a variety of countries. It is an amazing experience to read poems in one's own language, but in a foreign language this becomes rather exquisite. Reading such poems helps introduce a person to the culture represented by that language. My own poetry is rather minor compared to what I have read by others, so I am publishing these merely as a hobbyist with the hope that some lines here may strike a common chord for those who happen to turn these pages. Welcome to my way of seeing – and in a sense it is a way of singing."

His poems

Frank has divided his collection into five thematic sections: Nature, Latin America, Seascape, Reflections and Faith. His nature poems offer us a way of seeing his environment, but they usually include a comment that is both simple and profound.

Geese

There go the geese again
before the autumn rain:
summer time is going.

Along the icy street
each and all we meet
say: soon it will be snowing.

Frank sees nature as revelation. As in "Bow River" (Canadian Rockies): "...and the river so serpentine underlines/the purple ridges high in their grandeur, aloof with snow patches hiding some ultimate truth."

But he also responds with the passion of a biblically literate Christian to social conditions, as in:

While I sat on the steps of the cathedral
"What do I have?"

facing Central Park in San José
a girl limped by with cerebral
defects, I heard her try to say:

Do you have any coins, por favor?
I wish like the apostle Peter
it was not gold I had, could offer more:
'In the name be healed!' – could greet her

with a miracle and see her well again.
I reached into my pocket, found a few
cold coins, Gracias, she said, limped on
while I remembered Peter: 'What I have
I give you.'

On the steps of the cathedral
this seemed too little.

Truly, this is a way of seeing the poor and seeing ourselves in relation to them, with lots of blank space around it so we can reflect on what the author has painted for us.

Frank Sawyer was born in Victoria, Canada, in 1946. He is married to Aria Byl, and they have four children and two grandchildren. He studied and served as pastor in the Netherlands, taught in seminaries in Latin America and teaches in Hungary today. He has published eight books on philosophy and ethics. He can be reached at sawyer@t-online.hu.

"shadows" is essentially repeated in the word "silhouettes." It is significant that the birdcalls which break the silence at the end of the poem are not the jarring ones as earlier on, but encouraging calls to go forward. I think the point is that birdcalls come from above, just like a divine sign. I leave it up to the reader to read the poem as best understood by one's own experiences.

Copies of *A Way of Seeing* can be order from Frank Sawyer: sawyer@t-online.hu

Ferenc Költemeny lives in Sarospatak, Hungary and works with Frank Sawyer.

On the Trail
for Harry

Harry K., are you on the trail today?
Stepping through the snow you go.
'A piece of cake', you often say,
but winter makes our steps go slow.

It must indeed be this way.
But just to see a quiet quail
its feathers fanned in fashion

this will avail us moments of golden
glow and infinite feelings on the trail.
A path so new, so old, each day
and our footprints etched there forever

even when we depart in glory.
Harry K. it's your story.
I hope you are on the trail today
dancing like a quail.

frank sawyer

In the Garden
for Curt

Curt Gesch are you hoeing your garden
making a bit of a mess it seems
carelessly casting mixed dreams
into the slight spring wind?

Are you beating down the weeds
with so many mixed seeds
which softly savour the earth
for all they're worth?

Why do you fight the chaos
this way as if the loss
of entropic energy
will never move us from this place?

When autumn comes it comes with
colours
like a dozen flags waving bravely
and all your dreams are singing
like only yellow and purple

know how. Some how the ringing
choir cannot even be silenced
by winter snow and icicles balanced
like dripping pools, whirling

with sunshine and exquisite silence.
In every season I see you there for hours
entrenched among the flowers.

frank sawyer

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

A fool for Christ – I once was gay

How do I attempt to explain to someone that I once was gay and am no longer? That I am now married to a woman and have a baby?

Culturally speaking I am a fool. I am lying to myself and to my wife and to my daughter. I must be this terrible person stringing my wife along, lying to everyone I know and to myself as well. The voice of culture states that eventually I will come out of the closet and that I will admit my sexuality, and they will applaud my relinquishing my "false identity as a so called straight man." My so-called unhappiness and unfulfillment will lead me out of where I am at present and into the world's standard of living. Some people looking at my life now, will state that I really wasn't gay to begin with, that I was probably bi-sexual or just experimenting.

All of this is expressed without the full knowledge of my life and what has happened in my life. These are generalizations made without even knowing me. These are judgement statements, definitely not words of acceptance and diversity, which are used so much in today's statements of human rights.

Having just returned from a marriage conference which was designed specifically for those whose marriages were impacted by homosexuality in some way, I was reminded of our foolishness in the eyes of the culture of today.

Doormat prejudice

1 Corinthians 1:27 says: "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;"

To the world, staying together as married couples, even though impacted by someone who struggles with homosexuality, is foolish. The husband or wife (the one who doesn't struggle with "this" issue) is considered a doormat, naïve, ignorant, stupid and weak. Yet God uses the weak things to be strong. He uses the foolish things to confound the wise.

Sadly the "doormat" view is increasingly welcomed in the body of Christ. Christians welcome the easy way out, as divorce rate rises way past the world's statistics. Is there hope? Do we believe that God is a God of impossibilities, and do we believe that he can do anything?

Many marriages have survived the homosexual struggle of a spouse, as couples submit their marriage and lives into the healing hands of God. Many lives are being transformed and made new. These lives are changed because of people's radical belief in a God who does not leave them undone, empty-handed or alone. Trust is being rebuilt in the arms of hope, and this takes strength, courage and much submission to the Lord Jesus, rather than trusting in ourself and in our own strength.

Real answers

This past weekend I met men and women fighting for their lives and for their marriages. I saw and heard them, desperate and needy, pouring out their lives at the foot of the cross as they take refuge in the body of Christ. The Lord God Almighty heard their cries, wiped their tears and soothed their hearts. These men and women may have looked foolish, weak and sickly dysfunctional according to the world standard of strength, but what I saw was genuine strength, courage, honour and love. I saw a community that couldn't care less what the world thought but radically pressed in to serve one another in prayer and love. I saw beauty in the ashes of many couples.

2 Corinthians 12:10 states, "that is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

I am thankful that I have this weakness, that I will be insulted by the world, that it will be hard sometimes. I will face plenty of persecution from the world's eyes, for when I am weak, then I am strong. This foolish standard of pressing in to Christ even as I struggle with same-gender issues, this embracing my "true identity" as a male made in the very image of God, designed to walk with my wife as two people united to show the world the character of God is good. Very good. I do it with joy, and with the utmost of gratitude to Christ who was the ultimate fool.

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Patchwork Words
Melissa Kuipers

The empowering nature of humour

For a long time I haven't given humour the credit it deserves in our lives. I've seen it as a means of entertainment, or a way to provide critique. On a deeper level, perhaps I've understood it as a means to lighten up our serious lives and remind us that in the grand scheme of things, worry accomplishes little.

But I've been thinking that humour is a much more powerful gift than we often recognize, and I'm starting to believe it serves many diverse purposes in our lives on earth. More than a coping mechanism, I think humour can serve as a means of empowering or healing.

I started thinking this way after sharing one of those powerful mother-daughter bonding experiences that comes along only once in a while. A few summers ago, my mom invited a friend of ours and me to drive to Nova Scotia with her to cheer her on as she competed with her team at the national Breast Cancer Survivor's Dragon Boat Festival in Halifax

Strong feelings

Many sentiments emerged throughout that weekend: strength from having survived pain and tragedy; unity and solidarity within teams created through months and years of hard physical discipline, but even more so through the unique bonds of shared pain; a little bit of healthy competitiveness; a pervasive sense of synergy shown as women hugged and congratulated members of other teams. Participants experienced a sense of mourning for lost loved ones, remembered through a large decorated board on which were written the names of past teammates who had been lost to reoccurrences of cancer, and lamented through the sombre and beautiful Carnation Ceremony in which pink carnations are tossed into the river by teammates and supportive attendants in honour of those lost to breast cancer. But one sentiment which I didn't expect to experience so strongly throughout the weekend was that of humour – rich, playful, and authentic – manifested in many ways.

Permission to laugh

When we arrived at the docking area, we enjoyed watching the variety of brightly dressed, smiling teams and deciphering the witty and carefully chosen names printed across uniforms: Bosom Buddies, Wonder Broads, Chemo-Savy, Knot a Breast, Tit Bateau, to name a few, and Mom's team, Rowbust. During the day, vendors sold a variety of cheery items as team fund-raisers, such as "Titties for Twoonies," strings of bright pink bosom-shaped beads. At the evening banquet, teams got up and presented light-hearted ditties and cheers they had written with actions. Some teams wore all pink, others dressed as pirates, and others proudly wore those baggy beach tees with caricatures of voluptuous female figures from the shoulders down. The whole evening was filled with laughter from dragon-boaters and supportive friends and family.

At one point in the evening, one of the members of the hosting Halifax team made a tribute to Dr. Don McKenzie, who's hypothesis that repetitive upper body exercise would improve breast cancer survivor's health and quality of life kicked off the first survivor's dragon boat team in Vancouver in 1996. In a touching address, this woman thanked Dr. McKenzie for his research and the sense of hope he endowed. But what struck me was the specific thanks for naming this first team "Abreast in a Boat," and thereby giving future teams permission to "be playful with names," these puns adding a joyful aura to the movement as a whole.

I've felt this jovial tone to be pervasive throughout all of the dragon boat celebrations and intrinsic to the celebratory nature of the events, the solidarity, the response to the pain of the past. It's a humour which lacks the darkness of bitterness, which is in no way self-deprecating, but rather empowering. It is a humour of strength which arises from surviving deep fear and pain in body, soul and mind, and, without forgetting the past, is able to still embrace each day and believe that all things can work together. The weekend was filled with the kind of laughter which comes from personally experiencing the brutality of life, and having come through it with the eyes to see that it is still beautiful.

In such a paradoxical way, pain and joy are both healthily embraced in the Dragon Boat Festivities. This particular weekend in Halifax was an unforgettable one because, in a single event, participants embraced a variety of human experiences with a vulnerable strength, empathetic competitiveness, genuine hope, and, with uniting force, a vivid sense of humour.

Melissa Kuipers (mckuip@gmail.com) lives in St. Catharines and teaches English at a Christian highschool. She co-leads a club called The Justice League which raises awareness and funds for social justice issues.

Defining success in ministry

Bob Zomermaand

Over 30 years ago I spent my summer working for a landscaping company in the city where I would be attending seminary in the fall. During that particular summer, I had the opportunity to spend several days working by myself on a new lawn on a college campus. Ever since that week, I have often taken people – particularly my children – to see "my lawn." As I put it, "This lawn is the one tangible thing I have done in my life." The lawn is the one physical item I can use to define my accomplishments in life. I can point to it and lay claim to planting the grass – and, behold, it flourishes to this day! In my life of ministry, on the other hand, I find very little that can be said to be the result of my labour. For a landscaper, the growing grass is proof of a job well done. But how does one define success in ministry? To sustain pastoral excellence, we need a definition of pastoral ministry success that is viable.

Counting the chickens God hatched

I spoke to several pastors who acknowledge they have very little each could point to as solely a product of their labour. After all, which pastor will claim that it was he or she rather than God who worked the miracle in the life of a parishioner? Who will say that it is her preaching that changed the heart of a sinner to a devoted follower of Jesus? Who will claim that his time spent with a youth is the reason faith blossomed into commitment to Jesus?

When someone involved in ministry looks at his own labour, it appears fragile and unsophisticated for such a significant calling. Ministry is a vague entity. One pastor describes his work in this way: "Real success in ministry is producing genuine spiritual growth. If every single person in our congregation grew in their relationship with God, then our church would be successful" (Rob Jansons, Monroe, WA).

Pastor Harold Winter (Fredericton, NB) defines his success by looking for the ways he is used by God in ministry. He calls himself a catalyst for the work of God in the life of the congregation. He himself does not usher in the results God desires. Rather, he is used of God to activate a process that otherwise remains latent. Harold defines success as perceiving himself to be a catalyst in the hand of God.

Another pastor (Jim Dekker, St. Catharines, ON) reflected on the temptation to be successful in the eyes of the broader culture. He believes that temptation leads to various aberrations in ministry. People in ministry are tempted to pursue growth in a congregation's numbers and, meanwhile, fail to pursue the spiritual disciplines that fuel growth in Christ. Jim senses that we can succumb to the personality cult of the nearest mega-church and begin to worship the methods of that church, but we ourselves fail to worship the Lord God in spirit and in truth. Additionally, he points out that glitzy ads for the next big thing fill even Christian magazines. The stampede created by the race to "the top" in the church tramples the humble follower of Jesus in the dust. But the race to the top rarely reflects the mind of Christ.

Know God and know oneself

So what is a person involved in ministry to do? How can one be a citizen in our North American culture and be a faithful servant of Christ and his Church? I think it begins with a careful examination of one's own heart. The Lenten Season is progressing as I write this. This season was set apart by the church so that the individual Christian may take the time to scrutinize one's heart. In doing so, we detect the disappointing failures, the distressing follies, and the dazzling fantasies of our hearts that yearn for popularity, power and prestige. If anyone is to measure success in one's ministry, each must know his own heart. As John Calvin suggests in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "True wisdom is to know God and to know oneself" (Book 1, chap 1). Anyone who desires to be successful in God's sight needs to come to that self-knowledge that lays aside all personal hubris. In the place of self-importance, the successful minister catches sight of the hand of God in all his work.

If people involved in ministry will submit to an annual "spiritual physical" with God's Word as the doctor, they will soon enough realize that to be successful they must be willing to step aside from the spotlight and let all the attention fall on Jesus. John the Baptizer said, "He must become greater, and I must become less" (John 3:30 NIV). When people in ministry keep to that ideal, faithfulness to the call of God defines success. Pastor Tom Bomhof (Surrey, BC) suggests that pastors and churches should scrutinize the level of faithfulness to God and their call to discipleship in themselves and their ministries. God is the one who is orchestrating the process of developing the image of Christ in us. I Thessalonians 5:23-24 reads, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. .... The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." When we are tempted to look too far afield for the definition of our success, we need to come back to God's call to each of us. He will be faithful to see our calling through to the day of Jesus; in response, we follow God where God leads.

Follow the right lights

I want to focus for a moment on the pastoral calling itself while recognizing that what I have to say for pastors also relates to the rest of the congregation.

A troubling matter for pastors is that the cultural ideals of success pressure them from many sides. A council filled with individuals successful in the business world can prod the pastor to think in terms of business-oriented success models. This council, perhaps unwittingly, may redefine the pastoral role based on a business model of success. When there is strong pressure to redefine the role of a pastor, the one in ministry needs to again clearly define success by the biblical models of service and sacrifice seen in Jesus.

A young pastor's proud parents and grandparents can also create subtle temptations. They're excited for the success of their young son or grandson who takes a call to a bigger congregation, takes a more prestigious position in the church hierarchy or earns a higher salary than the local pastor. Not only folks such as these parents and grandparents but each person in the church must guard against the inclinations of our hearts that are impressed by the bright lights of favourable ratings as compared to the humble call of Jesus to wash the dirty feet of disciples.

In the Letter of Paul to Timothy, we find this: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV). Here God

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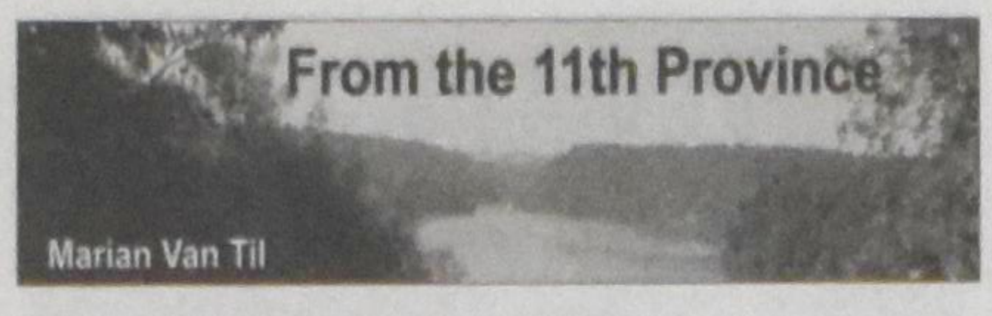
Reflections



You believe *what?*

I've run across a poll that literally made my jaw drop. The information was gathered by Rasmussen Reports, which has a stellar track record in predicting election outcomes. The company is increasingly considered to be among the most accurate of collectors and analyzers of American public opinion.

Released on Easter Sunday, the poll indicates that *79 per cent* of Americans believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. I was gobsmacked at that high percentage, to use a word my British friends relish. Only 10 per cent said they don't believe the Resurrection occurred. The remaining 11 per cent aren't sure.

It's no secret that Christianity has a vastly different place in society than it did when I was a child 40 and 50 years ago. Most Americans were churchgoers then (as a large percentage still are compared to other nations). But it was also common then for unbelievers – or lukewarm believers who preferred to read the paper on Sunday mornings – to send their children to Sunday school or church with neighbours who were believers. Far from fearing "indoctrination" of their children, it was precisely indoctrination (at least in Christian morality) that such parents were hoping for. They recognized the mitigating influence of Christianity on society and wanted their children to be part of it. We are still seeing the positive fruits in many adults of that childhood exposure to the Word of God.

American society is now more secular than ever since the days of the colonists (remember those God-fearing Puritans?). Even so, only 16.1 per cent call themselves "unaffiliated" with any religion. Some of those are like the people I've just described who may shrug off faith for themselves but don't mind exposing their children to Christianity. But some are hardcore secularists for whom Jesus Christ and his church are the enemy. Even at this date in American history the percentages of people who practice non-Christian religions are few: Judaism: 1.7%; New Age, Native religions, Unitarianism or a mixture of faiths: 1.2%; Buddhists: 0.7%; Muslims: 0.6%; Hindus: 0.4%; all other world religions: 0.3% (source: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, June 2008).

Dichotomy between belief and action?

Well, what about the actual faith of that very large majority who say they believe the veracity of the central tenet of Christianity – Christ's resurrection? I instantly asked myself: "What earthshaking things would happen in this country (and elsewhere) if all 79 per cent of Americans who believe that Christ is risen acknowledged it in their lives?"

I've wondered such things before. In my own neighbourhood there are a goodly number of Christians, and I live in "godless" New York State. Fan out from there. I run into and talk with Christians all the time, here and in Ed's and my travels across our country. Yet we Christians don't seem to mount the kind of overt witness we should, individually and collectively, to our neighbours, our towns, states, nation and to other nations.

I think of my own faith. Can people who interact with me, but who don't know me, tell I'm a Christian? They don't know of my thinking, writing, church music-work, tithing, nor any of the reasons, humanly speaking, I have to "boast" of my faith (to use Paul's language). But I pray that by my fruits strangers will recognize Christ in me and that God will present opportunities to reveal him. "You're a Christian, aren't you," I've said to strangers in whom I saw Christ in words and actions. Occasionally I've had it said to me. I imagine you can say the same. Is that enough?

Multiply those Christians by millions. There *is* all kinds of evidence of faith at work here. Not the least example is Americans' immense generosity to those in need, at home and abroad. There is a provable, direct correlation between that generosity and the very high percentage of Christians in the U.S. compared to other nations. Yes, including Canada. While charitable giving in the U.S. has dropped a bit during this recession, under normal circumstances the most generous Americans (in Maryland) give away two-and-a-half times as much, measured in percentage of income, as the most generous Canadians (in Manitoba) do, says Vancouver's Fraser Institute, and the people in numerous other states are not far behind.

In individuals and nations there is always room for repentance and renewal, and plenty of room for clearer faith-related thinking (and acting), of course. Yet even when Satan seems to be winning the war – as he often appears to be these days – it's important to remember what the Lord told Isaiah when the prophet was thoroughly disheartened by Israel's idolatry, "My Word does not return to me empty." It didn't in ancient Israel, it didn't in the 1950s and '60s, it doesn't now. And it never will.

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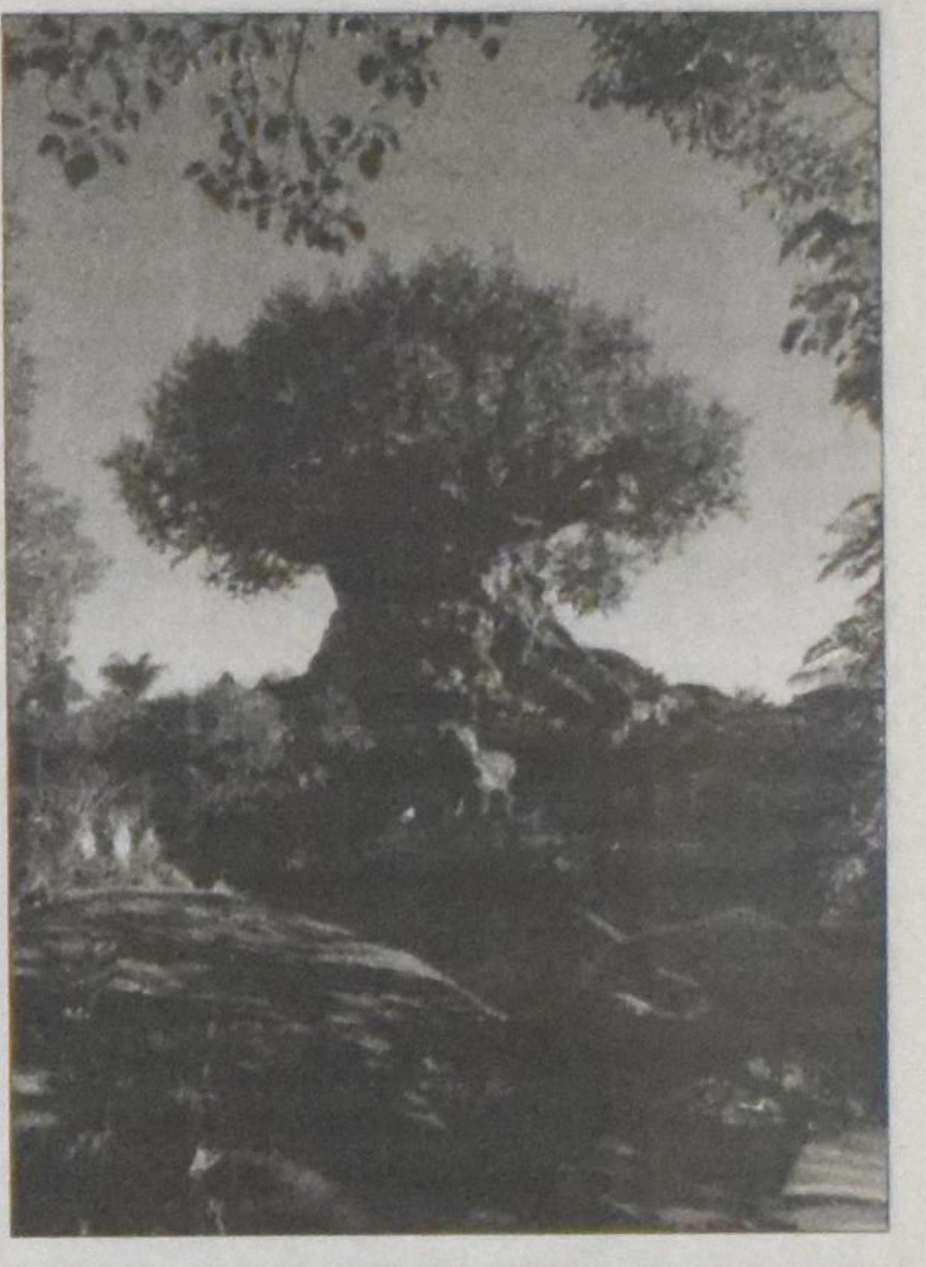
Co-owning the Earth
Bert Hielema

Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.

I go to a movie perhaps once a year, which means that I only go when people I trust recommend it. Not surprisingly, when I saw *Avatar* my amateurish reaction was one of appreciation. I sympathized with these humanoids, who, with the help of animals, went to great length to protect their tree habitat from being destroyed by ruthless operators.



I may be entirely wrong, but I thought I noticed some biblical themes: these creatures loved creation, which, I think, is the best way, perhaps the only way, to express our love for God. It's always been a mystery to me how church-goers claim to love their neighbours, yet have no qualms to despoil the soil, air and water on which their well-being depends.

At the film's very end there was a statement that "very few chose to join them," which made me think of Jesus' words, "Many are called but few are chosen."

Biblical themes

The entire movie reminded me of The Tree of Life, a recurrent theme in the Bible, which starts with The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and ends with the Tree of Life in Revelation 22:2, with a curious annotation: "The leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations." This suggests to me that trees have miraculous powers, perhaps beyond our understanding. It is well-known that patients who can see trees recover faster than those who look out on lifeless scenery. Somehow experiencing God's living world around us makes us live better and longer. Deuteronomy 20 warns us not to kill off trees, even when it might give us an advantage in war.

John the Baptizer compares trees to people. In Matthew 3:10 he says that "every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire." Psalm 92:12 tells us that "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like the cedar of Lebanon." These cedars are now all gone, of course.

In the very centre of Scripture we find the story of Jesus, who died on a Tree. I think it is noteworthy that his blood and flesh was first pounded into a tree before his body fluids ebbed away into the earth. We tend to limit Jesus' redemptive act to us, humans alone, but Jesus' death was necessary to redeem the entire world, including trees, perhaps the most abused single species in creation.

Trees are firmly rooted in the earth from which they derive their food and minerals. They stretch out their branches to heaven as in prayer, a sure sign that this world has been created by God. In Psalm 1 God compared his children to trees, because we too are firmly rooted in the earth.

Earth and trees

What is so unique about trees that the Bible begins and ends with them? In many ways trees are like the earth itself. A strange thing about a tree is that during its life nearly all of it is dead wood. As a tree grows, it has only a thin skin of living tissue underneath its bark. The wood inside is dead, as is the bark that protects its delicate tissue. More than 97 percent of the tree is dead before it is cut down. In that way a tree is very much like the earth itself. Around the circumference of the earth, on its surface, is also a thin skin of living matter, of which both the trees and we human beings are part. All the rocks beneath us and the air above us are dead.

In the same way the earth on which we live, is like the tree. The earth too is a living, breathing organism, now choking on acid rain, running a fever on Global Warming, and angry, very angry, witness the earthquakes and the ever more violent storms. Romans 8 describes the earth as groaning with pain. Only when we perceive the earth as a living entity, can we become aware that we cannot treat it as cruelly as the contract soldiers did in *Avatar* and as much of our industrial system does today. The earth is alive because God is alive. If we treat the earth as if it were dead, then essentially we say, "God is dead. He has no relevance for me."

We all know that trees are our lungs: they take the CO_2 from the air and breathe out pure oxygen, the very chemical on which our life depends: it requires the oxygen produced by 4500 trees to keep one person in the West alive.

Trees: regard them as your neighbours, love them the same way you love yourself, your family and your friends, hug them and pray for their continuous healthy state.

Bert Hielema (bert@hielema.ca) lives on 50 acres off mostly trees, adjacent to thousands of acres of crown land. Google 'hielema.ca' for more of his writings.

Society

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Our sex-saturated society still considers cheating immoral

What happens to celebrities happens to regular folk. It just isn't front-page news. The paparazzi do not tail regular folk. They tail celebrities to get just the right photo that could pay off their mortgage. Many of them tried hard to get the first photo of Tiger Woods when he was in rehab, and, more recently, they tried to get the first photo of Sandra Bullock's face since news broke her husband, Jesse James, cheated on her. They got neither.

I was born and bred in a subculture where words like "virgin" and "pregnant" were not used in polite company. My mother successfully hid most of her pregnancies for many months by wearing everyday clothes. For sure, there are no photos of her naked and protruding belly no matter how much she loved being pregnant. Then came the 1960s and 1970s.

Loosening of morality

Sex during that time became more blatant and shameless. It was stripped of its refinements as well as its hypocrisies. Theodore Roszak, author of *The Making of an Elder Culture*, believes "From the invention of the contraceptive pill in the 1950s to the outbreak of AIDS in the mid-1980s, boomers enjoyed unprecedented sexual freedom, a window of erotic opportunity the world may never see again. They are the only generation in history to have known risk-free, care-free, responsibility-free sexuality."

And so morality changed. Now, whenever we turn on cable or satellite television, we can find ourselves facing a blizzard of profanity as well as graphic coupling. The same goes for the Internet. No longer do porn addicts skulk around magazine racks at the corner store. Now they access pornography by the tap of a key while lounging in a favourite easy chair.

And yet, cheating on one's spouse remains an immoral act that threatens the foundation of a couple's relationship as well as the family unit in the world of celebrities and common folk alike. And this is how it should be.

I may have mentioned before in one of my previous columns, most often spouses who cheat fall into one of three categories. In the first category the cheating spouse is making a big once-in-a-lifetime mistake. He is careless with personal boundaries and gets caught in a web of his own making. He accepts responsibility and is genuinely remorseful. In the second category are those who are not committed to monogamy. When marital challenges surface, he readily strays in forbidden territory. In the third category are spouses who fall into serial affairs possibly due to sexual addiction and other complicated personality or character flaws. Which brings us to Tiger Woods.

Some of us do not like to write or read about Tiger's fall from grace, but I believe we can learn something from his licentious and self described "entitled" behavior. Like I said above, what happens to celebrities happens to regular folk.

Uphill struggle

According to various theorists, Tiger Woods may well have a narcissist personality (D.Todd, Vanc.Sun, Apr. 3). Not only did his parents behave as if they gave birth to a messiah, his mother referred to him as "the universal child" while his father saw him as "the chosen one." And while a fair number of us may have narcissistic leanings, since we live in a "culture of narcissism," a full-blown disorder is characterized by a sense of grandiosity, self-importance and haughtiness. At the same time, narcissists harbour compulsive needs for attention and adoration while believing normal rules do not apply to themselves. For instance, it is not unusual for a narcissist to plead with a betrayed spouse not to leave the marriage while texting a lover the same day for a clandestine hook-up. Consequently, tough love from the betrayed spouse may well be a necessary element in a narcissist's healing.

So, what are Tiger's chances of redeeming himself? Unfortunately, Tiger's transgressions are not minor, and forgiveness should not be given quickly so life can be back to normal. Early or easy forgiveness lets people off the hook and does not lead to true healing or reconciliation but poses as cheap grace.

Most of all, Tiger, and those of us who struggle with similar demons, need to be transformed from the inside out. Unfortunately, changing ourselves is not easy. Letting go of long ingrained compulsions and needs takes commitment and hard work even when we are inspired by a strong and comforting faith. We cannot do it alone and need accountable companions along the way. But, as Christians, the knowledge we are already redeemed through Christ may well humble us in such a way we will find the courage and strength to work through difficult times into an eventual life of faithfulness and gratitude.

*I used the pronoun "he" for easy reading but women also have affairs. At the same time, more married men then women stray from their marital vows.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Bolt

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If one wants to think of the Belhar as Reformed in a non-theological, non-doctrinal, non-ecclesiastical way, then one cannot turn around and then insist that it become an *ecclesiastical* confession. That introduces non-ecclesiastical (political?) criteria for confession into the church.

2. No matter how vigorously it is claimed that worldviews are not theological, any fair and close examination reveals the contrary. Theology abstracts key themes – Holy Spirit, creation, kingdom of God, sin, the work of Christ, atonement, justification – from Scripture as a whole in an orderly, disciplined fashion. The well-known worldview formulation Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation is precisely such an abstraction; it is a systematic formulation of the Bible's own narrative frame; it is a piece of (good!) theology. It is not prudent or helpful to continue protesting so much against theology; dame theology, as Dutch philosopher Klaas Jan Popma used to say, cannot be so easily dismissed. Nor are there good reasons to try. All God's children are amateur theologians. Some of us have been blessed beyond all our deserving to even get paid (a little) to do it.

The RCA (Reformed Church in America) affirms the Belhar Confession.

Dr. John Bolt is a professor of systematic theology at Calvin Seminary.

Chong

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al to faith *plus* good works. In 20th century Apartheid South Africa, the Belhar's fear is that membership becomes conditional to faith *plus* the right skin color and class; hence, its emphasis on true faith in Christ as the *only* condition for church membership. Some worry that this statement does not emphasize the need for a renewed biblical lifestyle in a church member. Of course, the phrase, "*true faith* in Jesus," already assumes that a renewed ethical lifestyle will be a fruit of genuine faith in Christ. It assumes the Heidelberg Catechism's definition of true faith (Q. and A. 21, 64 and 86) and the Belgic Confession's articles on faith, sanctification and the Church (articles 22, 24 and 29).

Finally, the Belhar affirms and works out of a major Reformed theme: the Lordship of Christ. Because Christ is Lord of all things, there are neither sacred/secular nor spiritual/physical dichotomies. If Christ has reconciled us to God, the Belhar claims, he also reconciles us to each other. The unity of the church is not only in spiritual terms but should also be manifested in genuine community and loving fellowship as a visible reality. Obedience to Christ in the church also means obedience to God's justice in the world. The second last statement in the Belhar is: "Jesus is Lord."

So, in conclusion, do these themes and emphases make the Belhar "Reformed enough" in its theology? Well, as I wrote in my opening paragraph, there will probably be no consensus on that question.

(Endnotes)

1 Jan Rohls, "Reformed Theology – Past and Future" in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, eds. Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker (Eerdmans, 2003) p. 34.

Shiao Chong is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister serving at York University in Toronto.

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Classifieds

Thank you

We, Repko and Ini Popma want to **express our appreciation** for the many cards and flowers we received for our 70th anniversary. We were deeply moved by your best wishes and the memories that you shared. Let us continue to love and serve our faithful God.

Repko and **Ini Popma**

Anniversaries

We rejoice and offer thanksgiving to God for the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of

Arie and Jean (van der Kooi) De Haan

May 12, 2010

May God continue to bless you in the years ahead as you serve him! With love from your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Address: 52 Kipling Cr.,
Woodstock ON N4S 8C2

Anniversaries

Lollum 1945 — May 9 — Grimsby 2010

With praise and thanksgiving to our Lord for his faithfulness, we hope to celebrate D.V. the **65th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents, grandparents & great-grandparents

Art and Gertie Wagenaar
(nee **Vander Sluis**)

It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them in his care. (Psalm 84:11) Love and best wishes.

Joe & Dian Wagenaar
Shane & Kim,
Teresa & Sean – Kirsi, Liam
Rachel & Jesse
Justin, & Solinny
Sara
Ron & Jenny Wagenaar
James & Melissa – Matthew, Abigail, Reuben, Samuel, Josiah, Shiloh
Dan & Alisha – Grace, Heather, Rebekah
Dave & Barb – Alexandra, Ian & Michael, Jacob
Monica & Andre
Keith & Ann Wielink
Fred & Kathy Wagenaar
Mark, Jesse, Ben, Josh

Address: Apt 203 - 28 Robinson St N
Grimsby ON L3M 3C9

With thankfulness to God, on April 29, 2010

Dirk and Harriet Zomer

hope to celebrate their **50th Anniversary** with children and grandchildren.

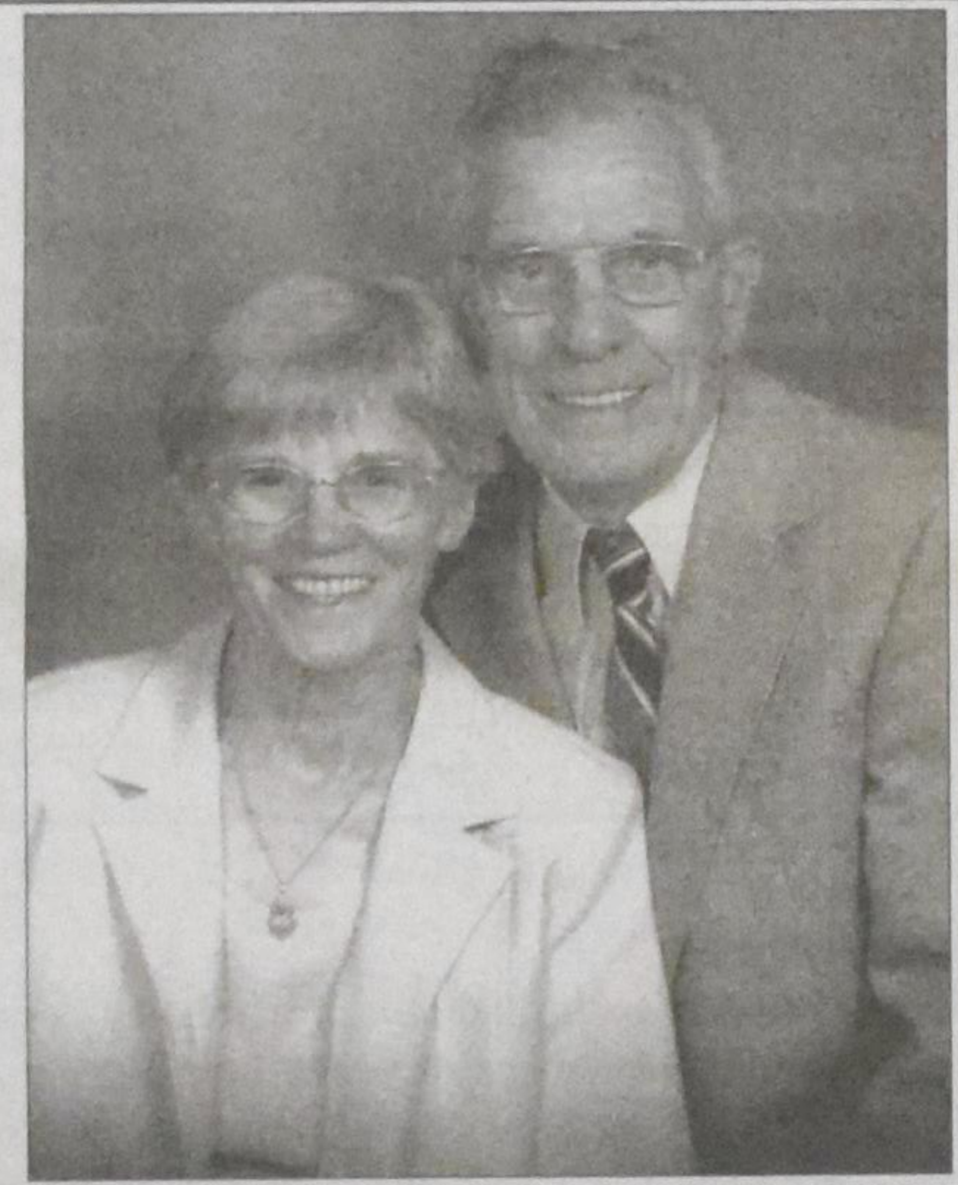
Albert & Alice
Jianna, Richard, Charles
Cobden, ON

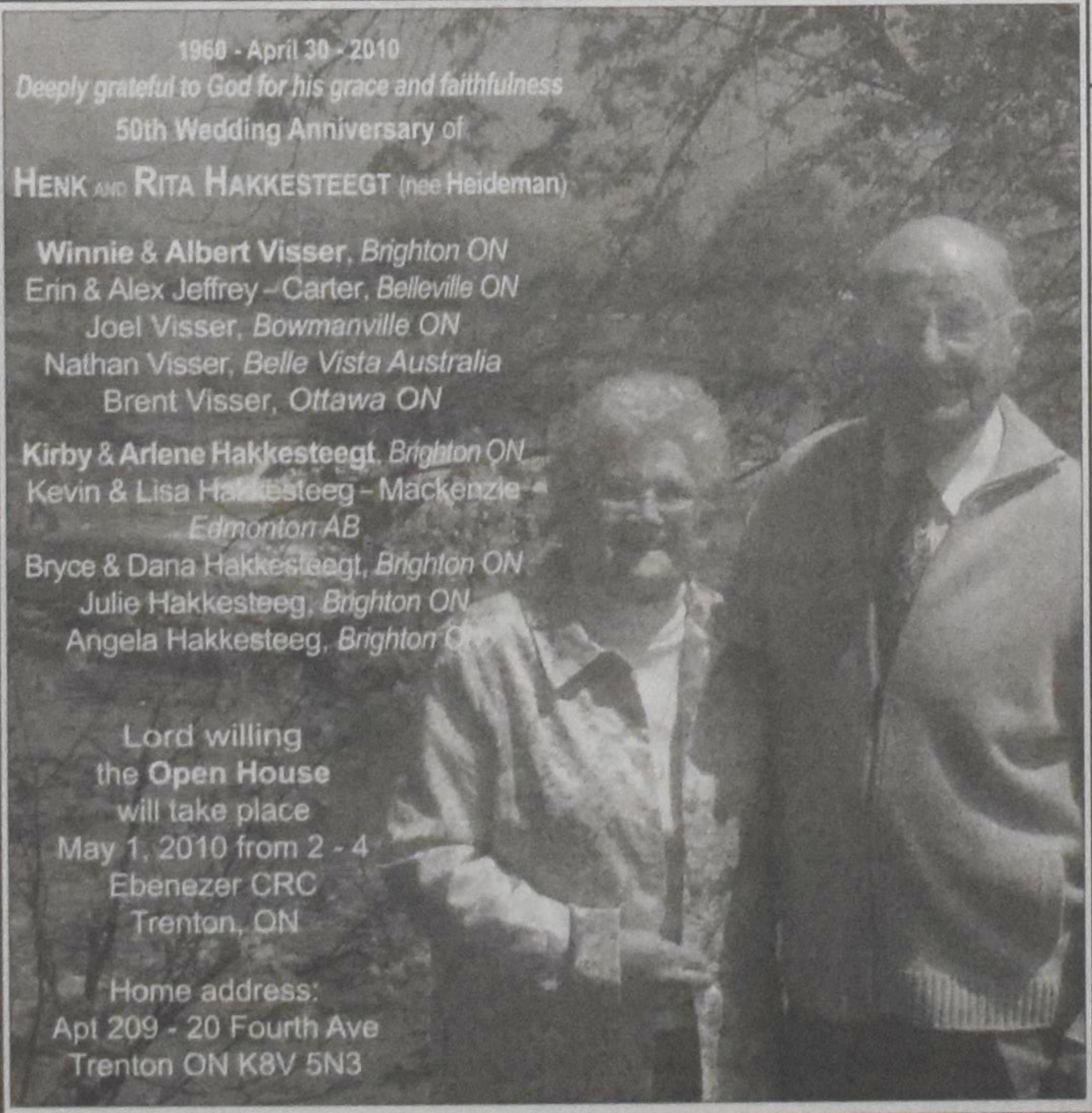
Harley & Marian
Eric, Matt, Teresia
Kitchener, ON

Freda
London, ON

Jane & Jim
Josh, Mark
Norwich, ON

Rick & Michelle
Beaver, PA, USA





Obituaries

Albert E. Greene, Jr.

born October 19, 1916 in Seattle to Albert E. and Gertrude Greene, Sr, passed away April 8, 2010 in Mt. Vernon, WA.

He grew up on Evergreen Point, attended Bay School (Hunt's Point) and Garfield High School graduating in 1932. He then attended the University of Washington for his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. (1976), Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary (B.Th. 1945) and Faith Theological Seminary (STM 1946).

In 1939 he married Thelma Heydt in Seattle. They were married for 50 years.

From 1940 to 1948 Al and Thelma taught in the China Bible Seminary at several locations in China. Upon their return from China, Al, with his brother Joseph S. Greene, cofounded Bellevue Christian School in 1950. He dedicated the rest of his life to Christian education.

Al was a teacher, principal, then superintendent of Bellevue Christian School. Following his retirement, he continued to speak and teach world-wide regarding Christian schooling and educational philosophy. In 1979 he founded Alta Vista College a graduate school for Christian teachers. He also wrote several books on Christian education. He held board positions in the Washington Federation of Independent Schools, Christian School International (Grand Rapids, MI), and the Institute for Christian Studies (Toronto).

Al pastored Juanita Community Church (Kirkland) for many years during the 1950s and 1960s. He had a pastor's heart for people.

His interests and joys included hiking and backpacking, reading, discussing Christian education, and telling a good joke.

His wife Thelma preceded him in death in 1990, an infant son John in 1943, and his siblings Joseph S., William A., and Elizabeth E. Greene. Survivors include his children Norman (Bonnie) Greene, Anne Miller, Elizabeth (Jon) Barrows, Dave (Diane) Greene, and Peter Greene. Other survivors include 11 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren, and numerous extended family.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.
Philippians 4:12

Margaretha Slotman (nee Jansen)

At her home in Smithville
On Saturday, March 27, 2010 in her 85th year.
Beloved wife of Fredrik Slotman
Loving mother of:
Hennie Grootens (and the late Gerrit) of the Netherlands
Rhea and Bill Brunsveld of Cambridge
Betty and Albert Hovingh of Clifford
Bernice and Tim Robson of Smithville
Cherished by her ten grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.
Dear sister of Johan and Bertha Jansen, and sister in law of Hermien Jansen of Holland.
The funeral service was held in the Smithville Christian Reformed Church, Tuesday, March 30, 2010 conducted by Pastor Greg Fluit. Internment in Lane Cemetery, St. Anns, Ontario

Corresponding address: Mr. Fred Slotman
B0x 794 - 169 West Street, Smithville ON L0R 2A0

5 November 1917 --- 19 February 2010

Bastiaan Nederlof

His great wish to see the Lord was granted to Bastiaan Nederlof when he passed away suddenly but peacefully at home on February 19th.

Bastiaan was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands on Nov 5, 1917, attended Leiden University and the seminary of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Apeldoorn, met and married Roely Velema who was to be his partner in life and ministry for 66 ½ years.

He served congregations in Eindhoven and Dokkum where his daughters Nancy and Elsy were born, then moved to Canada to serve the Lord among the Canadian immigrant population in the Christian Reformed Church. Subsequent decades saw service in churches in Houston, BC, Edmonton, AB where Theo was born, Bellflower, CA where Rick joined our family, Vancouver, BC, Hamilton, ON and Victoria, BC.

In his years of service to his churches and denomination, he was an inspiration and blessing to many.

He will be deeply missed by his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who enjoyed his love, companionship and insights.

His wife of 66 years – Roely Nederlof-Velema
His children:

Nancy and Bob
Katie

Elsy and Rich
Rochelle and Stefan
Eline, Noah, Joshua and Hanna
Erik
Anna
Sara and Brent – Peter

Rick
Krista
Brianna

Theo and Debbie
April
Kyle

Address: 808-3755 McGill Street, Burnaby BC V5C 1M2

Wilfred (Wytze) Martens

Suddenly at the St.Joseph's Hospital, Hamilton on Monday March 28, 2010 at the age of 82 years. Husband of the late Dorothy (Wiersma) Martens.

Loving father of
Ralph and Jan of Stoney Creek,
John and Mercedes of Grimsby,
Mary Martens of Thornhill, and
Flo and Brian VanLeeuwen of Nanticoke.
Dear grandfather of Randall.
Wilfred is also survived by sisters, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law and nieces and nephews.

Funeral Service was held at the Hagersville Community Christian Reformed Church, Hagersville on Thursday April 1, 2010 at 11 a.m. Interment at Burlington Memorial Gardens.
As an expression of sympathy donations may be made to the charity of your choice. www.rhbanderson.com

August 2, 1929 - March 27, 2010

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matthew 6:33

After a lengthy battle with cancer, at McNally House Hospice in Grimsby, the Lord in his infinite wisdom called home his son

Johannes (Joe) Zantingh

of Smithville, in his 81st year.
Beloved husband of Eltje (Elly) Zantingh (nee Sinkgraven) for 57 years.

Loving father of Tilda and Don Dam, Karen and Will Lammers, Henry and Janet Zantingh, Ron and Kim Zantingh, Tony and Irma Zantingh, Nancy and Harry DeVries, and Angela and Rick Attema. Beloved grandfather of 33 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

Dear brother of John and Alida Zantingh, Bert and Fenna Zantingh, Aleda and Mel Rozema, Sienie and Albert Katerberg, Jane and Martin Vanderveen, Henry and Brenda Zantingh, Jerry and Helen Zantingh, and Rhea and Ed De Vries, and brother-in-law of Harm Kelly and Willy Zantingh. Predeceased by his sister Ali Kelly, brother Rick Zantingh and brother-in-law Bert Van Soelen.

His life was devoted to serving his Lord and Saviour and to his family. The memorial service was held at the Smithville Christian Reformed Church on Wednesday, March 31. Interment Union Cemetery, Smithville.

Our sincere thanks to Dr. Amanda Marrone, Juravinski Cancer Centre, CCAC, the Red Cross and the West Niagara Palliative Care Team for your professional and caring support. If desired, memorial contributions to the Foundation for Niagara and Hamilton Area Christian Schools or the Juravinski Cancer Centre would be appreciated by the family and can be made through Merritt Funeral Home (905) 957-7031 or merritt-fh.com

Abeltje Tjitske Sytsma (nee Doll)

The Lord called home his beloved child on Thursday, March 25, 2010 at the age of 95 years from her home at Gardenview, Townsend.

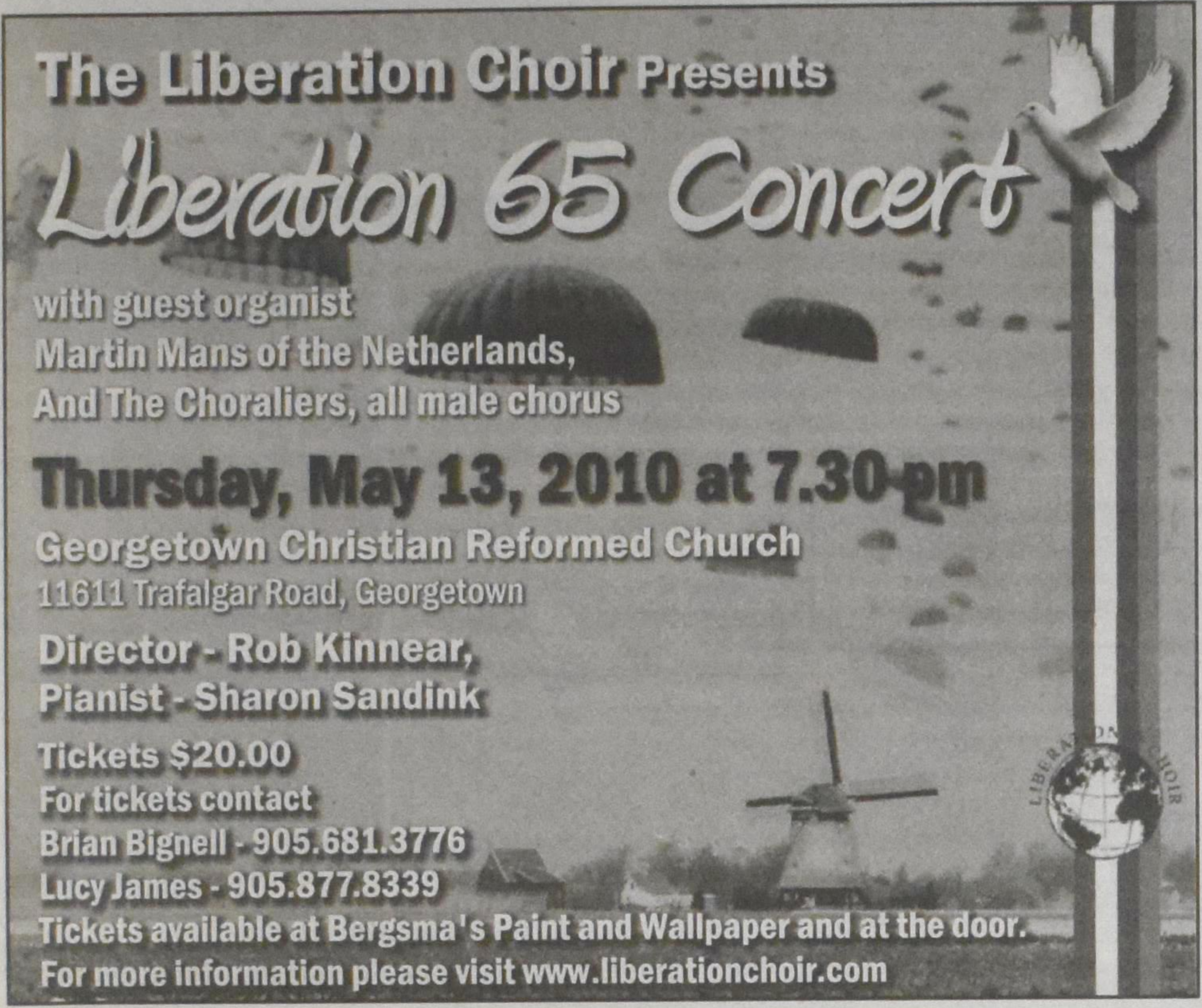
Beloved wife of the late Oebele Sytsma (1996).

Loved mother of:
Jack and Justina of Caledonia;
Bernie of Beamsville
William & Jenny of Holland, Michigan
Garry & Harmene of Hagersville and
Peter & Jean of Holland, Michigan.
Beloved grandmother of 14 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren.

A celebration of Ada's life was held at Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, Jarvis on Monday, March 29.

Donations to C.R.W.M. or the charity of your choice in memory of Mrs. Sytsma would be appreciated by the family. Friends are invited to send condolences to the family at www.cooperfuneralhome.ca

Event /Classified



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Chocolate Chip Cake

1 3/4 cup boiling water
1 cup uncooked oatmeal (quick or old-fashioned)

1/2 cup margarine
1 cup lightly packed brown sugar
1 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 3/4 cups flour
1 tespoon soda
1/2 tespoon salt
1 tablespoon cocoa
1 1/2 cups chocolate chips
3/4 cup chopped walnuts

Pour boiling water over oatmeal and margarine. Let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes. Stir. Add brown and white sugar. Add eggs. Mix well. Measure together flour, soda, salt and cocoa and add to mixture. Mix well. Add about half of the package of chocolate chips.

Pour batter into a greased 9 X 13 pan. Sprinkle walnuts amd remaining chocolate chips on top. Bake in oven preheated to 350 degrees for 40 minutes. Test center to see if it is done.

I have enjoyed making this recipe over the years. It came to me from Helen who did keypunching with me in a bank basement. We were a small crew that worked the night shift so the customers could have up-to-date statements in the morning.

Marilyn Wubbenhorst

Ministry

...continued from page 13

eminds us all that a pastor needs to keep an eye on the approval of God, not of humanity. When the pastor rightly handles God's Word of truth, he/she can appear without shame before the throne of God. I believe appearing without shame before God is a goal that can define success in any ministry.

Jim Dekker concludes, "Jesus' warnings and encouragements in Matthew 25 and the urgings to justice in Micah and Amos are traffic signals. Follow those lights. They're dimmer than the other, brighter lights of great ratings, but they last longer." Defining success in ministry will always find us on our knees, serving the oppressed, loving the undeserving and bringing hope to the despondent. May we follow those dimmer, less obvious, signals that show the way to the Kingdom of God. When we do, God's approving Spirit will sustain pastoral excellence in ministry.

Pastor Bob Zomermaand has been a member of an SPE Peer Group. He currently lives in Grand Rapids, MI. Each person quoted also has taken part in an SPE Peer group.

Job Opportunities

REDEEMER
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Redeemer University College welcomes applications for possible part-time faculty positions in the following departments for the 2010/11 academic year:

- Biology
- Business
- Computer Science
- Environmental Studies
- Geography
- History
- Mathematics
- Philosophy
- Psychology

Please consult the website www.redeemer.ca ➔Quick Links ➔Human Resources ➔Employment Opportunities, for more detailed information.

As a liberal arts and sciences university college rooted in the Reformed tradition of Christianity, we seek candidates who are committed to teaching from this perspective. Interested applicants should possess at least a Master's degree and should submit a curriculum vitae, two letters of reference, evidence of teaching quality and a short statement on how their own faith commitment fits the mission of Redeemer University College.

Deadline: May 14, 2010 or until filled.

Direct applications to:

Dr. Jacob P. Ellens, Vice President, Academic
Redeemer University College
777 Garner Rd. E., Ancaster, Ontario, Canada L9K 1J4
E-mail: jellens@redeemer.ca

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 3, 4, 6, 8 Vision Banquet ~ Eurovangelism featuring guest speakers from Russia, Galina Dzhuzenova and England, Gary Cox. Locations: **Brampton, Orangeville, Cambridge, Drayton.** Call Brian Lise at 1-866-630-6301 for complimentary tickets

May 5 Canada/Netherlands Friendship Day, **Burlington**. Doors open at 6 P.M. program starts at 7 pm. Free admission, for more info visit www.cnfa.ca or contact Jack van der Laan at 905 332 7000 or Hans Kloet at 905 336 7184.

May 12 The Ambassadors Male Chorus will present a program together with the Rozenburg's Mannenkoor (Male Choir) at 8PM in the Mnt Hamilton Christian Reformed Church, Upper Wellington & Stone Church Road, **Hamilton**, ON. Freewill collection to cover costs.

May 13 The Liberation Choir Presents, Liberation 65 Concert with guest organist Martin Mans of the Netherlands, and The Choraliers, all male chorus 7.30 pm, Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, 11611 Trafalgar Road, **Georgetown**. For tickets contact Brian Bignell - 905.681.3776 or Lucy James - 905.877.8339. Tickets available at Bergsma's Paint and Wallpaper and at the door. For more information please visit www.liberationchoir.com

May 14-16 Dutch ancestry conference. See March 22 issue p. 21 for more details.

June 9 Hollandse Dag at the Moorefield Community Centre. 10 am. More details in May issues.

June 16 Hollandse Dag 10:00 am at First Christian Reformed Church, 310 Kingscourt Avenue, **Kingston**, ON Speaker Rev. John Klomps. For info call 613-546-5615.

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.

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(formerly Athens Christian School)

are invited to celebrate our Heritage, Faith and Vision

Saturday, June 26, 2010

Open house 3-5 p.m. Dinner 5 p.m. Program 7 p.m.

Cost for dinner: $16 adults, $8 children.

Sunday, June 27, 2010

Worship Service and Strawberry Social 2:00

RSVP by May 12, 2010

Postdated cheques for the dinner made payable to H.C.C.S.
7463 County Road 28 RR 2, Addison ON K0E 1A0
Phone: 613-498-4176 Email: info@hccs.ca
Website: www.hccs.ca

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
Psalm 126:3

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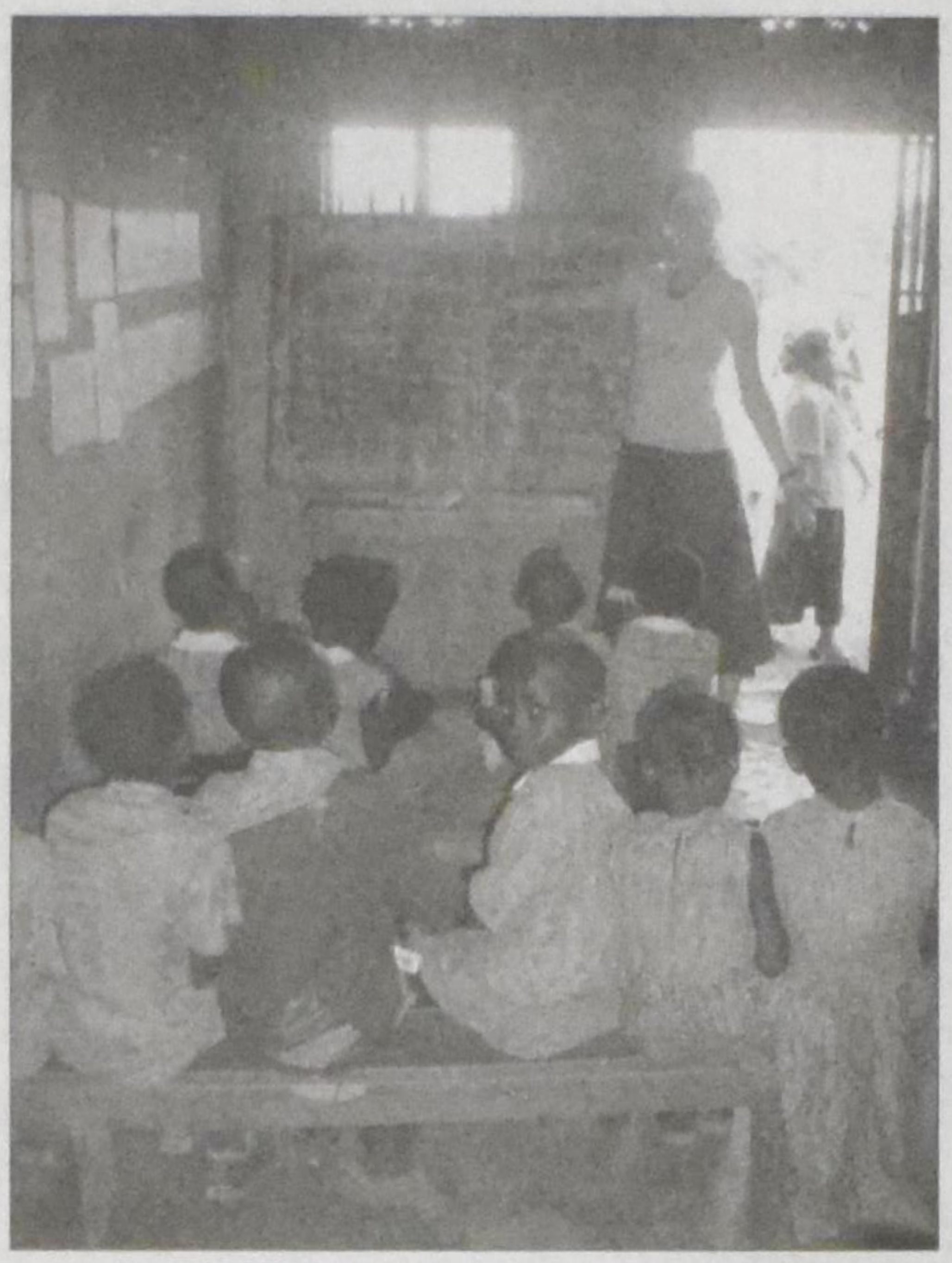
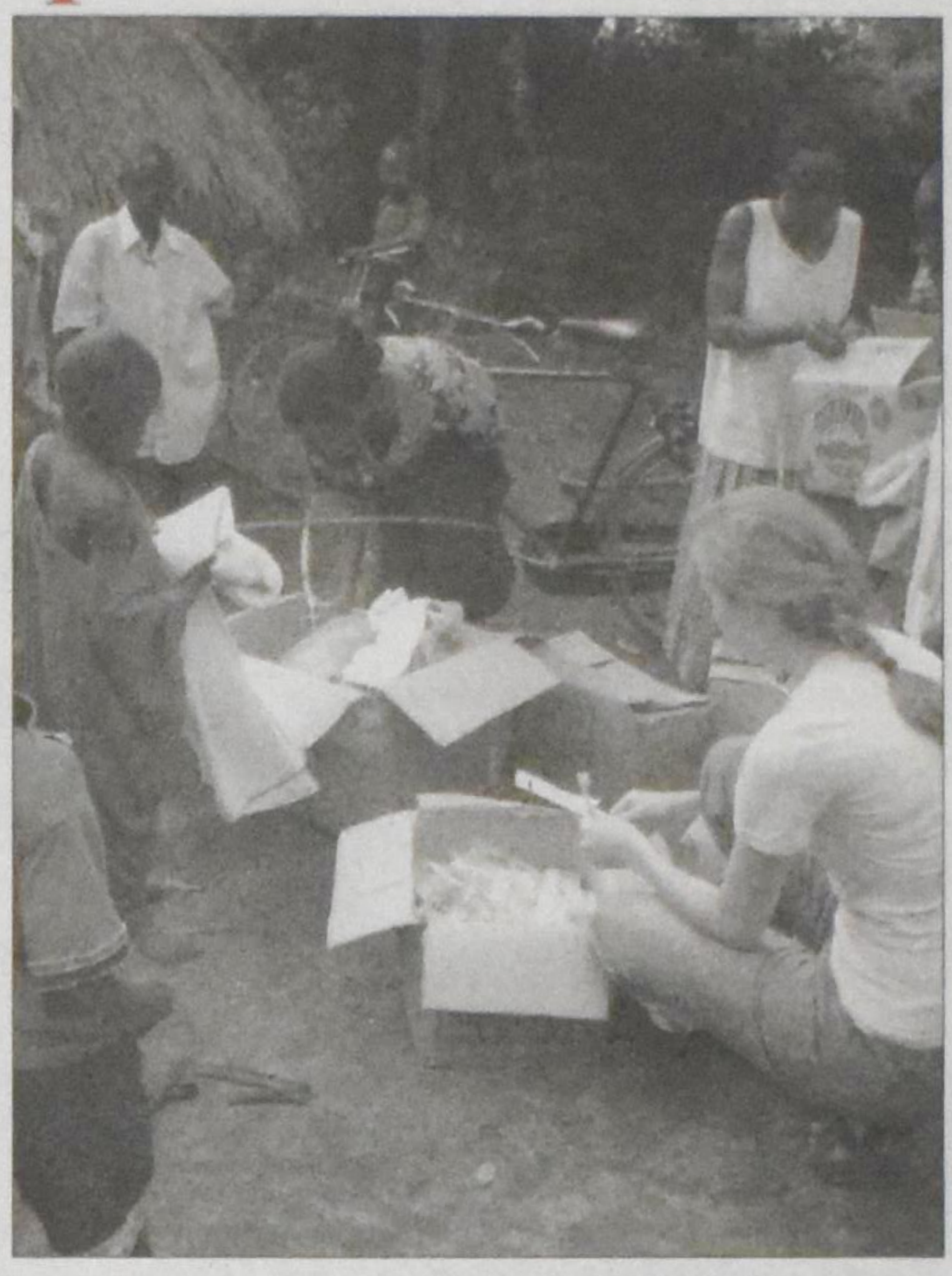
A Christian Retirement Community

Travel Essay

What can be found in the emptiness

Jessica Wallman





It is already hot as we walk the familiar path. We greet each person working in the fields as we hike to Uganda's Primary Progressive School. Our skirts cause the dry grass along the edge of the path to rustle faintly in the morning air.

Three weeks in, my project partner, Tash, and I are finally getting used to the rhythms of life and work. Although I will not teach today, my attention is quickly drawn to our students. As we enter the school yard they run to greet us. They cry out in excitement, and their joyful smiles make my heart melt. We distribute balls and Frisbees for the last few minutes before the school day begins.

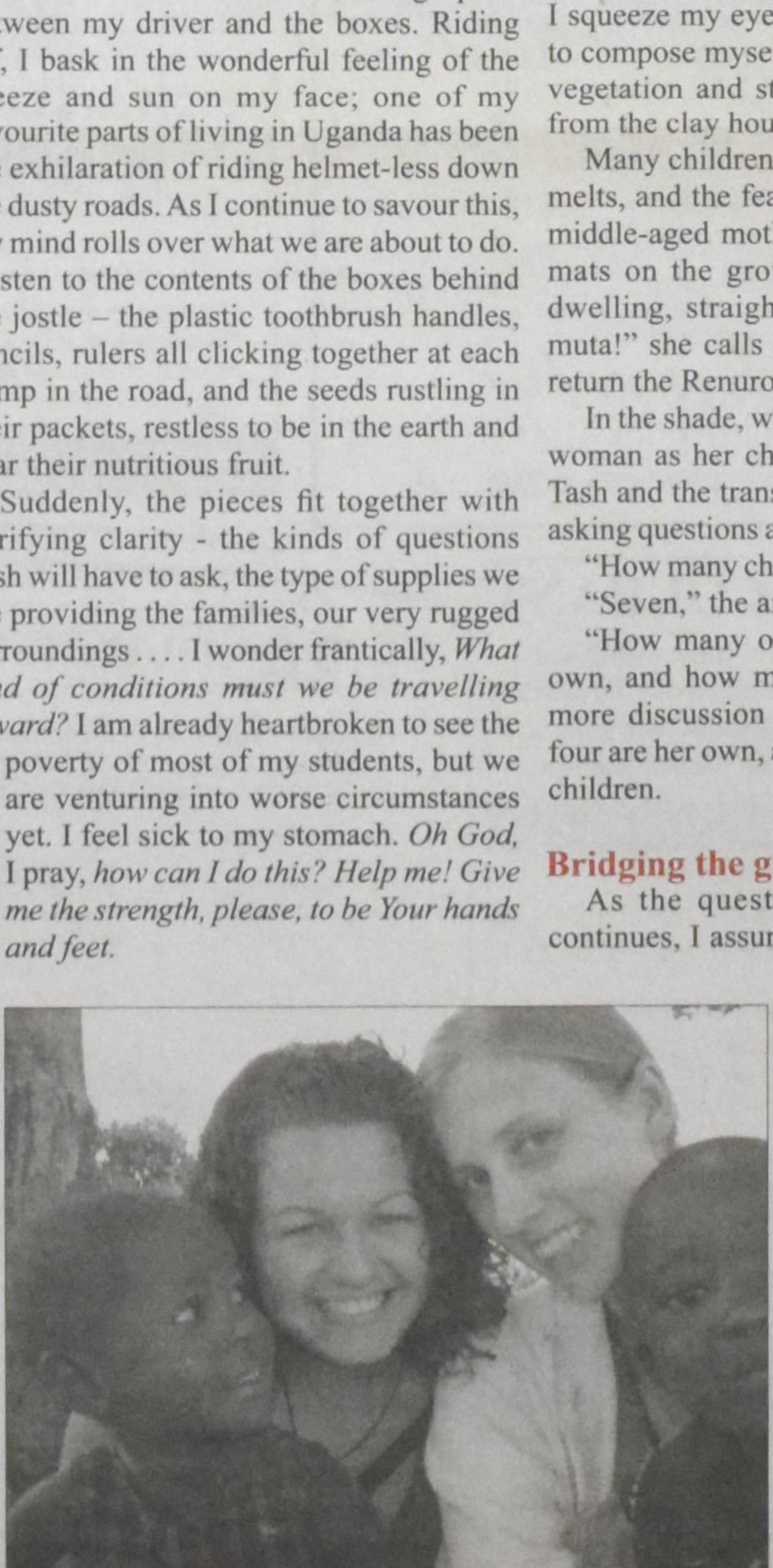
As we continue toward our destination, we are both lost in thought. Tash is nervous. This is her first time doing social work like this, and I admit, I am nervous for her. My first day teaching here, I was panicked too. We are still getting used to being African. So many cultural misunderstandings have already surfaced, and now it is time to test how sensitive we have really become. It is not easy to ask deeply personal questions of the families we are about to visit.

We continue across the yard toward the storage shed where helpers are already loading the large boxes of basic necessities. The precarious stacks are secured with rope onto *boda bodas* (small motorcycles). Rev. Mike, the jovial president of Umoja Orphanages and one of our supervisors, greets us with a huge smile. The Director of the school, one of the teachers and our translator make up the rest of our companions for this first day in "the bush."

Off the beaten track

Without too much more conversation, I slide side-saddle into the snug space between my driver and the boxes. Riding off, I bask in the wonderful feeling of the breeze and sun on my face; one of my favourite parts of living in Uganda has been the exhilaration of riding helmet-less down the dusty roads. As I continue to savour this, my mind rolls over what we are about to do. I listen to the contents of the boxes behind me jostle – the plastic toothbrush handles, pencils, rulers all clicking together at each bump in the road, and the seeds rustling in their packets, restless to be in the earth and bear their nutritious fruit.

Suddenly, the pieces fit together with terrifying clarity - the kinds of questions Tash will have to ask, the type of supplies we are providing the families, our very rugged surroundings . . . . I wonder frantically, *What kind of conditions must we be travelling toward?* I am already heartbroken to see the poverty of most of my students, but we are venturing into worse circumstances yet. I feel sick to my stomach. *Oh God,* I pray, *how can I do this? Help me! Give me the strength, please, to be Your hands and feet.*



My driver is now racing us down a very narrow path, so fast I barely notice the very tall elephant grass that fences us in. I squeeze my eyes shut in one last attempt to compose myself as we clear the walls of vegetation and stop, several metres away from the clay house of our first hosts.

Many children run to greet us. My heart melts, and the fear and nausea are gone. A middle-aged mother, setting up large reed mats on the ground outside her humble dwelling, straightens to greet us. "Mulimuta!" she calls out excitedly, and we all return the Renuro greeting.

In the shade, we sit down across from the woman as her children gather around her. Tash and the translator get straight to work asking questions and recording the answers.

"How many children are you caring for?"

"Seven," the answer comes back.

"How many of these children are your own, and how many are orphans?" After more discussion in Renuro, we hear that four are her own, and three are her brother's children.

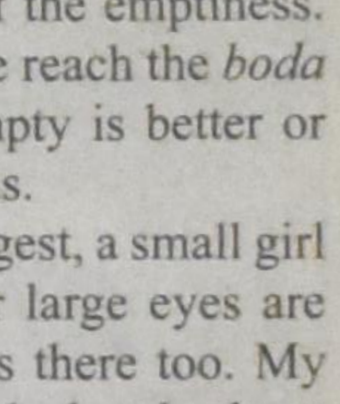
Bridging the gap

As the question-and-answer volley continues, I assume my own task of visual appraisal. The children are malnourished and scarcely dressed. Their gums are inflamed. I think I should feel something, but I feel nothing. I have neither sorrow nor happiness. I cannot even cry as I look into their hopeful, curious, beautiful eyes. I feel as though I have a big, dark emptiness inside.

I continue the appraisal to distract myself. The house looks to be a one-, maybe two- room clay house. The thatched roof is in need of repair, but overall, the structure looks fairly sound. I take stock of the fields: the harvest will be sufficient if the plants are not overtaken with insects. The majority of the crop is *cassava,* a bland root vegetable and staple food.

Tash's questions are coming to a close. Thankfully, it is time to distribute the supplies, which I hope will distract me further from the awful gnawing of the emptiness. And I briefly wonder, as we reach the *boda bodas,* whether feeling empty is better or worse than feeling nauseous.

The first one is the youngest, a small girl not even school-aged. Her large eyes are full of fear, yet curiosity is there too. My companion with the box of blankets beckons her in Renuro to get a shirt and pants. I spy a very cute hooded sweater in the box. I smile and show it to her. It evokes a toothy smile, and she walks toward me with more confidence. As I help her put it on, I can smell sun and earth radiating from her, her skin soft and warm against my ever-chilly hands. I suddenly find what I was looking for in the emptiness: love. It is a deep, real love for a little girl I do not know, and for all the people I encounter in this life who have lives I can never understand. But I realize then that they are just as human as I, with the same capacity to receive blessings, trials, adventures, disappointments, memories, hopes and – above all – love.



Jessica was raised in Ingersoll, Ontario. She is currently pursuing her Bachelors of Science and Education at Redeemer University College. The hardest and happiest days of her life thus far were spent in Uganda, and she hopes to return there some day soon.